

Sarah Woolford

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Name: Sarah Woolford

Age: 62

Original Home Village, Town or City: Brighton

The Church in Blackburn Diocese where you are serving: Preston St. Stephen

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

In one word, how would you describe what ordination means to you? Joy

Please give some insight (a few sentences) about your ordination decision?

My call to ordination has come relatively late, and unexpectedly - at least to me. I didn't grow up in a Christian family and came to faith in my twenties. Then I got married, had a family and settled into a career. I was always involved at church, as part of the music group and also PCC Treasurer, but the demands of caring for a disabled son made it difficult for me to do much else. When I retired and my son had moved into supported living I initially looked forward to a quieter pace of life and maybe doing a "bit more" at church. But what I really wanted to do was study theology. So I signed up as an independent student at Emmanuel Theological College and graduated recently with an MA in Theology, Ministry and Mission.

While all this was going on people started telling me that I should think about pursuing ordained ministry and at the same time opportunities to preach, lead worship and get involved in mission work just opened up. It took me quite a while to listen properly to these wise voices, but after a profound experience of the Holy Spirit at our parish weekend away, I realised that God was asking more of me. So I took advice from a few trusted friends, prayed (a lot) and put myself forward for the discernment process. I am now so excited to find out what God has in store for me as a self-supporting minister.

What inspired you most during your ordination training?

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I have been part of the Emmanuel College community for nearly five years now and have been inspired by meeting so many people from very different backgrounds and traditions, all eager to serve God in whatever place and ministry he sends them to.

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

Learning to inhabit a new identity as curate in the parish that has been part of my life for over thirty years.

Share some thoughts (a few sentences for each point) about how you will support the Bishop in achieving these aims, and also how you will encourage others to do the same?

St Stephens is a very active in our local community, providing a range of events and activities including a food market, a lunch club and weekly community advocacy groups. Through all these activities we aim to bring Jesus to the people we live and work with.

For me personally, I have become much more involved over the past couple of years in some of our work with children and young people, and look forward to developing that further as a curate. I am a Foundation Governor at St. Stephens CofE Primary School and have started to deliver some of the collective worship sessions at the school. Our next step is hopefully going to be to find ways to include the school more intentionally in the worshipping life of the church. I have also joined the team leading our Youth Group, which is an absolute delight.

Please share some insights about what you personally and/or your church may be doing online; particularly anything innovative and successful you have done that other churches may be able to replicate.

We continue to livestream our Sunday morning services, as we know how much it means to those members of our church family who are unable to get to church in person, even when they are few in number.

Tell us about your family/ loved ones:

I have been married to Pete for (almost) 39 years. He is my biggest cheerleader and most longsuffering and patient friend. We have two adult sons, Sam and Teddy, and also include in our family Alice and Claire, whose parents were our close friends but sadly died far too early.

What do you do in your free time?

I have sung in choirs my whole life and these days am a soprano in the Preston Cecilian Choral Society. I swim and do Pilates, and have recently started dabbling in strength training. I read as much as I can and love cinema; any genre (well, not horror), any era, any language.

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

In my early twenties I worked as the bar manager at a restaurant in Soho, London and could mix two cocktails in each hand at once.