

# Clergy ministry can be a family affair

The spouses and children of our clergy often have a crucial role in our parishes. They reveal something here of life in the vicarage

WHEN a new vicar arrives at your church, their family usually joins your congregation too. And clergy spouses and children can bring skills and personalities that complement your vicar's.

Clergy spouses are often drawn into the life of the church, leading small groups, dealing with visitors to the vicarage, plugging gaps in the rotas, offering pastoral support – or even joining the paid staff team. Being upfront or ministering on the frontline might not be something they bargained for when they first got married.

The pandemic revealed just how much of a family affair it can be to lead a church. When clergy had to livestream services from their homes during the first lockdown, they often recruited family members to sing alongside them, lead intercessions, read from the Bible, or master the technology.

The congregation at Portsmouth Cathedral got used to seeing all four of the Percival family leading Morning or Evening Prayer together, or singing in their home or garden during livestreamed worship. For Canon Kathryn and the Rev James Percival, this was their job. But their children, Dom and Eliza, might not have expected such a role in our cathedral's worship.

Canon Kathryn Percival had only recently been appointed as our cathedral's Canon Chancellor and was still living in Southwark diocese, where her husband James was a



Dom, Kathryn, James and Eliza Percival in our cathedral

vicar. Dom had been a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral and both he and Eliza sang at school.

Dom, who is now 20 and studying at Durham University, said: "Eliza and I do like singing anyway, and we wouldn't have done it if we didn't want to. In fact, it was my idea to do a four-part Byrd anthem in our garden. We had sung around the piano together, but we'd never done anything like that before."

**'Though not clergy, there is a sense in which you are public property.'**

And James said: "When the churches were closed and there was no other music being provided,

I sensed that music was something we could offer. I actually look back on that family activity quite fondly."

It was James who was ordained first, studying at Ripon College Cuddesdon before ordination in 2003. After his curacy, he was team vicar in Sanderstead until 2013 and then in Limpsfield until 2020. So when the first lockdown started, the family were recording or live-streaming separate pieces of music for his parish and for our cathedral. James was then interim priest-in-charge at All Saints Ryde and a chaplain at the Queen Alexandra Hospital before taking up his current post as a naval chaplain.

Kathryn originally worked as a barrister and paused her career to have children. But she can recall certain expectations of her as a clergy wife.

## 'I feel quite proud of my mum upfront'

JACOB and Samuel Collinson have got used to seeing at least one of their parents upfront.

Their mum Amanda is their vicar, while their dad James leads Junior Church. At primary school, Amanda was the vicar who visited to lead school assemblies. And now that Jacob is at secondary school, one of his teachers happens to be his dad.

It's one of the things they've got used to as clergy children. It's also meant they've been happy to take a role leading prayers in services, or serving worshippers at Café Church.

"I do feel quite proud that my mum is up front teaching people about God on a Sunday morning," said Jacob, who is 11. "I think it means that everyone respects you as part of the vicar's family, but it also means you can't really say no to doing jobs around the church."

His mum Amanda, who is vicar of All Saints, Gurnard, and St John the Baptist, Northwood, on the Isle of Wight said: "It is actually a real family affair, as my parents and my sister also tend to get involved in church activities if they are over visiting, it's not just the boys. The boundaries between church and domestic life are quite blurred."

"But I do think that being at church has given our boys a natural confidence in talking to adults that I don't necessarily see in other children."

Samuel, aged 9, said: "At school, they do think we'll know the answers to the RE questions. And sometimes we do!"

"Eliza had bad reflux when she was a small baby, which made it difficult for her to keep things down," she said. "There were some weeks when we didn't attend on a Sunday, because it was too difficult, and both James and I were criticised by some members of the congregation as a result."



(Clockwise from top) James, Amanda, Samuel and Jacob Collinson

Another aspect of being a clergy family is answering the door or phone to those who need the vicar. James also experienced this as a child, as his dad was a Baptist minister.

"You're never quite off duty!" he said. "One thing I've been quite clear about is that I'll take a message, but if you are just chatting to me that doesn't mean the vicar automatically knows what we were talking about. If they want to speak to the vicar, they need to speak to her!"

The family have got used to mum working hard at Christmas and Easter, meaning they might not relax and open presents until after the Queen's Speech.

But Amanda and James are careful about pushing religion on the children, allowing their boys to make their own decisions about

faith. Jacob has been confirmed, and both boys can articulate their Christian beliefs, but their parents haven't forced them to say prayers unless they've wanted to.

Jacob and Samuel also appeared on screen during the first few livestreamed services from the vicarage during the first lockdown, alongside Amanda – while James took care of the technical side. It was another obvious way of showing how vicars don't lead parishes in isolation from their families.

"As clergy, we're really grateful for our families, for the sacrifices they make and all the bits and pieces of parish life that they didn't necessarily sign up for but get involved in nevertheless," said Amanda. "Without James, I certainly wouldn't be as effective a priest that I am today."

actually an expectation that I would muck in in James's churches, but I did take on the children's work because I wanted to."

Dom and Eliza can't remember life before their dad was a vicar, but they can recall their mum being ordained. She also trained