

Sunday 29th June 2025 - Interview with Laura Edwards

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Preacher: Laura Edwards

[0 : 00] So we're going to interview Laura in a minute, but just to introduce a little bit and kind of explain some of the jargon that's associated with Laura being a part of things with us. So Laura is what's called a curate, which is a training role for three or four years in church.

It's kind of like an apprentice vicar role, where after a good few years of different kind of church experience elsewhere and particularly study at college, Laura was selected to learn the ropes of what it means to be a minister.

In the church. So a curate comes from an ancient Latin term for care. So a curate, a caret, someone who cares. And a minister means someone who serves.

So Laura is primarily here in a caring, serving role, which is good. But really, we're all called to care. We're all called to serve. We're all ministers in that respect.

It's simply that the particular roles that people like myself and Laura have, they come with added leadership responsibilities. And a posh word for these added responsibilities, these particular minister roles is ordained minister, ordained by the bishop on behalf of the wider church.

[1 : 13] And I'm going to put on a little slide, because Laura was ordained at Litchfield Cathedral last night. We had to dress up in cosplay, but that was fine. Other than the gear, it was very special.

So yeah, very special service, which you'll hear. It was very hot as well. Polyester blend in 30 degree heats is never a good idea. Glad to get out of that one. But again, it was a special service.

And we'll hear a little bit more about how you felt being the center of attention and the prayers that were prayed in that one. I guess Laura coming here is part of a kind of mutual decision on your part and my part.

We knew each other a little bit over the years, but it's a kind of agreement that it would make sense for Laura to come here from our point of view, because we're looking forward to having you with us. And for Laura, it was her decision as well to come here.

So it's kind of an informal interview and selection process. But it's hopefully a win-win as we go through the next few years ahead. So this is Laura's first official Sunday with us, having got ordained by the bishop last night.

[2 : 14] So you're officially a reverend now, aren't you, I believe? Yes. Excellent. Change your driving license. Gets you off a load of speeding fines, I tell you. So we're going to find out a little bit more about Laura this morning.

Got some questions, but we'll kind of weave our way through this. So for Laura, it's been a busy few weeks in particular. Been finishing a degree at Theological College in Birmingham, moved house, got ordained last night, and it's a new job starting today.

So that's quite a lot to manage all in one go. You just moved it, though, haven't you, from Litchfield. So is that where you're from originally, or what's home life been like for you over the last decades?

So lived in Litchfield for four years. Before that, lived in Tamworth for about 20 years, but originally grew up in Willingham near Wolverhampton, which was where family was.

After university, moved around, lived in Birmingham town centre, Sun Coalfield, lived lots of different places, and then settled in Tamworth. And, yeah, probably wasn't intending to stay that long, but started family.

[3 : 24] And, yeah, really enjoyed being in Tamworth. Moved to Litchfield as my eldest daughter started secondary school. Really enjoyed Litchfield. And, yeah, and now here. Now here. It's all Midlands, black country, Staffordshire.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well and truly immersed. Yeah. Great, great. So coming here as Curate marks a new season of work in life for you. It's a full-time role here. But what's been your work sort of history before this?

So when I went to university at 18, 19, trained to be a primary teacher. I wasn't quite sure that was what I wanted to do, but because I didn't know my mum was a teacher, kind of got shoved down that sort of path.

I loved working with the children, but didn't so much enjoy the paperwork. And I just had, I recognise it now as a calling, but I didn't know it was that at the time, just this pull to work in the community, particularly deprived communities.

So I bravely came out of teaching and just kind of fell upon a sort of community project. And the problem with community projects is the funding was only for a couple of years, but just things just used to crop up through networking.

[4 : 29] So then I moved to a family's project on a big deprived estate, and then I ended up setting up the Sure Start Children's Centre on there. And then spent the majority of my career managing an area, managing the Sure Start Children's Centres.

My passion was for early years, for the kind of 0-5s, and for the families as well. Loved that kind of outward facing into the community work. And then for the last eight and a half years, I've worked for the Diocese of Litchfield as part of the mission team.

So it started off as a 0-5s advisor, so helping churches to engage with 0-5s. Then I went to 0-12s. And then we didn't have a youth worker, so I was kind of like 0-18.

And really, I was kind of about 0-85 by the time I finished. So I initially joined with that passion of early years, and then it just opens up a little bit more. Cool, cool.

So teaching, then Sure Start, then children slash youth slash older role for the Diocese as well. I mean, I guess that's a wealth of experience with younger people and families in particular then.

[5 : 36] What would you say are some of the key things, perhaps, that you've learned about children and young people and faith overall? I think one of the reasons that I applied for the role in the Diocese was not to underestimate children.

I think sometimes as adults we can feel like we've got it all sorted. I don't know about you, but I haven't got it all sorted. And I think we feel sometimes we're just going to impart all our knowledge onto children.

And actually, they have their own spirituality. They can have amazing relationships with God. And actually, we can learn so much from them. So it should be a two-way thing.

And I think even really small children, if you've got a two-year-old running around, some people would say, oh, that's really cute. I've been in other churches where people have tutted at that.

But how many people would think that child might be having an encounter with God? And I think we just don't think in that way.

[6 : 38] We don't necessarily value children in our society and also churches. Yeah, okay. Brilliant. Yeah, it's interesting when Jesus says, let the children come to me.

Do not stop them unless you enter the kingdom of God like a child. You won't truly enter it. I guess it's that idea of not being childish but being childlike. And I'm looking forward to you teaching me and helping us all to discover more about what it means to have a childlike faith.

Not childish but childlike and the wonder and the joy and the exploration that comes with that as well. My favourite, the passage that I always use is Matthew's, when Jesus turns the tables and the children are outside the walls of the temple because they wouldn't have been valued enough to go in.

But they're the ones that recognise Jesus for being Jesus. So all the people in the temple didn't get it. And at the end they're worshipping him and they get chastised. And Jesus is like, no, they get it.

And yet they couldn't even enter the grounds of the temple. So yeah, I love that one. Great. And for you, was it a whole faith thing, was it a childhood thing? Have you always sort of gone to church and knew God was there?

[7 : 43] Or what's your own faith journey been? Yeah, and I think maybe that's, I had an amazing faith as a child. So maybe that's part of the reason that I can understand that.

So my mum came to faith after I was baptised. And so I was taken from it as a baby. And my mum was involved in everything. So it would be like the late 70s, early 80s.

She ran the Sunday school, the brownies, the PTA. And my childhood was sort of being dragged along with her. And so I kind of can't remember not having a sense of God.

I suppose as an adult, when I kind of came back to faith, you hear these conversion stories of people brought to their knees in the middle of the road by God. And thinking, wow, that stuff never happens to me. But actually, when I've looked back at my faith journey and realised that I've always had a sense of God, I've really come to feel blessed and appreciate that.

Okay. So your mum was pretty influential and crucial. Yeah, massively. For your own journey of faith. Yeah, yeah. What's family life look like for you now? Obviously, you mentioned Claudia. So there's Saran as well. You have a daughter.

[8 : 47] Tell us about what you've got at home. Okay. Chaos. Yes, I've got a 16-year-old daughter, Saran. She's just taken some GCSEs. And he's moving to college in September, which is exciting and also scary for her.

So, yeah. Claudia is 13. She's at school. I have a cockapoo called Frank. He tends to rule the house. Yeah, so, yeah, it's just the four of us.

And it's a big thing for the girls to move as well, isn't it? I mean, it's quite a significant life stage change for them. Are they excited or is it a bit of nerves or a bit of both?

Yeah, as children often do, they don't always do, well, they never do what you expect. I expected my older daughter to be more stressed by it, but she's really embraced it.

And then the younger one is still struggling a little bit, but, you know, she'll get there. We'll be gentle. Yeah. Good stuff. And what do you do for fun, to relax, either as yourself or as a family?

[9 : 49] What's your ideal day off or week off look like? Well, I mean, the last three years, because I've been working full-time and training, there hasn't been that much time for hobbies and things.

And I love getting out there, I love walking the dog, being in nature, you know, kind of doing day trips somewhere and getting out there. I love travelling when I get the chance.

I'm very arty, so I like to paint, but, again, haven't had a chance to do much of that. I like reading. Again, I don't think I've read anything other than theological books for a few years. I like a good Netflix series, you know.

Yeah, just like chilling at home. Top TV show ever? Oh. Mine's Yellowstone, all right. Oh, I did like Yellowstone, yes. I did like Yellowstone. Closely followed by Ted Lasso.

I have to think about that one, but, yeah. Sprung that one idea. I did, yeah. All right. All right, great. So the good news is there's art, there's animals, there's books, there's travel. We've got Water Collar Dabbers, Creating Space, Book Club, Park Club, where there's lots of things, ways to get involved as well, which would be great.

[10:52] I mean, turning to the fact that you're in a church leadership role now and being ordained last night. I'm also aware, obviously, as a woman, it's only really been in our lifetime that women were allowed to be ordained as priests.

And I think it's only as recently as 2015 that women were allowed to become bishops in the Church of England, which, 10 years, that feels crazy.

But what's been your experience so far of church life and leadership as a woman in that context? I think I've had a slightly different perspective because I've worked in the diocese while I was exploring my calling to this ministry.

In some ways, I was thinking the distinctly Christian job might have scratched that itch and God would stop prodding me about this, but, you know, it didn't. So it's, of course, I've had experience of the breadth of the diocese, which is both in tradition and geography.

And there are still people that really don't recognise women in ministry. At first, that slowed my journey down because I thought, why would I want to be part of this?

[12:04] You know, it's a bit archaic. But God just kept nudging me about it. And I kind of came full circle and thought, you know what, I need to be in this to change this. And, you know, he put me alongside some amazing friends to train with, real powerhouses of women, you know, that I just think, yeah, we are in it to change it.

And hopefully it will become more of the norm. What the church it should be. Yes. Yes. Great. Yeah. Okay. Okay. And there was a number of us here for the service last night.

You were ordained last night in a cathedral. And officially, Laura was ordained as a deacon last night, which is the kind of first year of being a curate. And then next year, she'll be ordained a priest, which means there's certain things she can do now, such as funerals and baptisms.

In a year's time, then Laura will be able to take weddings and take communion or lead communion as well. It's kind of like a probation year, almost. In that sense. And then you get the priesting in a year's time.

How did you find the service last night? And how did you, you mentioned a little bit, but how do you know that this is the right thing for you?

[13:18] I mean, the service last night was amazing. I was so nervous. I was better once I'd kind of got there. Yeah. But we went on retreat for a couple of days before. It was a silent retreat.

I'm not great with silence. And neither are my friends. I think I needed actually to talk about that. I was terrified. Yeah. It was just amazing last night.

I mean, I appreciate the services are very long. It was very hot. We've got lots of layers on. So at some point I was thinking, just don't faint. Just don't pass out. But it was very emotional.

You know, in the bishop lady's hands on me, I just, I could have really easily burst into tears. And I realised my tissue was on like the third layer in and I couldn't get to it. So I was thinking, don't cry. You could use your cassock and sort of swipe, you know.

But also watching some of my friends that I've journeyed with, you know. So it was just me, but then seeing. And even, you know, some people there, I'd only met a couple of days before, but still felt this incredible bond with them.

[14 : 16] And the man who preached last night was the man that led our retreat. And, yeah, the bishop had said, you know, the services, the deacon's ordinations are this massive outpouring of grace.

And I don't think I really understood that until I'd journeyed through the retreat. And, you know, being there and it's real. You know, you've done all the three years of hard work and it's suddenly like, oh my goodness, it's in a couple of days.

And then you do the, are you sure, God? Are you sure it was me? Are you sure it wasn't like the person behind me that you were calling? And then you kind of, all of those insecurities flood back.

And I think that's where the grace comes in that, you know, they mentioned a few times that you can't do it in your own strength. That you need God. And, you know, even the service last night, I feel like I needed God to just get through the whole thing really.

So, yeah, it was just an incredible positive experience that I won't forget. So how do you know that God's not got the wrong person? If that makes sense?

[15 : 17] Yeah. I think I took a long time to discern for various reasons. And I kept parking it and coming back to it. But God just, you know, I'd describe it as a sort of prodding.

You know, when I very first got the call, as I would call it, I just tried to ignore it. But God just, it just intensifies.

Yeah. And you almost have to take the next step and then you feel kind of a bit of relief. Okay. And eventually, kind of my attitude with it was, okay, God, I'm just going to push every door that comes along.

And if it opens, it opens. Cool. And with the attitude that actually if the door closes at any point that I need to accept that as well. Yeah. Which is hard when you've kind of, you know, the more you go into it, the more you want to do it.

Yeah. Cool. Okay. Okay. And obviously, you could have gone anywhere in the country looking for a curacy, you know. I know it's a two-way process. Why St. John's though?

[16 : 21] Why here? Well, I suppose I was at an advantage that through my day job I knew churches. And, you know, churches do have a reputation, good or bad.

And this church has a great reputation. Okay, that's a relief. And I know that I sort of made contact over a few things. I've known people that have been to church here over the years.

There were points that I'd, because I had to have a link church that I went to while I studied. And I don't know whether God puts things in your head or it's on the radar that I thought, oh, I wish I'd have chosen this for my link church, you know.

But actually, if I had of, I wouldn't have been able to come here as curacy. So I'd kind of had those thoughts a while back. But, yeah, so I come from a mix of tradition. I was brought up in a very high church.

I went to a Catholic secondary school. I've, like, lived with nuns. Silesian nuns in track suits, not the, you know, the full. Is that a thing? Yeah, it is a thing.

[17 : 21] Nones with bling kind of thing. Yeah, they were really cool. But then, as an adult, went into more, I suppose, evangelical, charismatic worship. I like lively worship.

I like spirit-led things. I like creativity being used in worship. So, yeah, and a big thing for me is the community aspect of here, the outward facing, that actually, you know, God isn't just in here, that God is everywhere.

And people out there are very much part of this as well. So that was probably one of the biggest pulls, really. Brilliant, brilliant. It's max of sort of anything from two and three quarters to four years, basically, that occurs to you.

And in that final year, you'll be looking around for a vicar job or a chaplaincy job or something that comes after this. A bit like Ruth was here and she's gone down to Cheltenham. So that will be Laura's stage in three to four years' time.

In the meantime, though, I guess, what are you most looking forward to about your time here? And what are you most nervous about that we might be able to ease your nerves on? Well, I'm looking forward to being part of such, like, a big, diverse community and such a friendly one as well.

[18 : 30] I mean, I've been to churches where no one's said, no one's spoken to me. And, you know, the welcome that me and Claudia got a few weeks ago, oh, it's just incredible. So I'm really looking forward to getting to know people and being part of this.

I suppose I'm looking forward to seeing where God's working and, again, here but also out there as well. And, you know, where we can join in with that. Cool, cool. And what's the nerve-wracking bit?

I'm quite nervous about doing funerals. Never done one. Not great with the dead. Okay. Okay. We'll get there. Who is? That's all right.

Well, Nigel, our undertaker, is at the back. Yeah, I haven't had much experience of that. Okay. But, yeah, a bit roomsy. Okay. So we'll pray for funerals. Yes, please. We will hold your hand in that one.

I've heard it's a real blessing and, you know, working with families. And I do think I'll probably come full circle and really enjoy that ministry. But at the moment, I'm just a bit nervous about it. Yeah, we won't drop in a deep end with that.

[19 : 28] That's all right. And especially after my lecturer at college was saying that on his third funeral, he actually fell down the hole that had been done. And that actually wasn't a fear of mine until he said that.

Now it is. Now it is. We could tell some funeral stories. Yeah, sure. Well, let's pray that won't happen, especially the first one.

Anyway, yeah. Give it a few after that. All right. Okay. Great stuff. Okay. And then a couple more questions, really. I guess we talked about having a diverse experience of different kind of church styles and traditions and so on, from tracksuit nuns to more sort of charismatic worship stuff.

What for you, and I think you touched on this a little bit, but what for you, how would you describe what is your take on what the heart of the good news of Jesus is? How would you put it in a nutshell, if you can?

Yeah, I think I've got probably quite a simple theology in that it's about love, and I think it's very much about meeting people where they are and loving them for who they are, because I believe that's what Jesus did.

[20 : 37] Yeah. And I think actually if we all did that, it could be quite transformative, really. Yeah, great. Not always easy. No. But, yeah. That sounds good to me. I think that's what we're called to do.

Yeah. I think you'll fit in. Yeah. That's good. That's good. All right. So, again, a couple of core questions. We're in the middle at a moment of a Sunday series called Living Prayer, which is looking at different ways and why we pray, how we pray, what prayer is all about.

That's a crucial part of what it means to do what we do, indeed, for anyone who wants to relate to God. Prayer is at the heart of that. What do you value most about your own prayer life?

And, again, what do you perhaps struggle with about prayer, knowing that all of us have days when prayer is easier than others and some days it's downright hard. So, where's the best and the worst of prayer for you?

I think I've been exploring this for years, really, to try and make it work for me. I know that the Church of England have their kind of set morning prayers and things. I always, well, I had a job where I was always straight in my car first thing in the morning, so I couldn't necessarily do that.

[21 : 43] I pray a lot. It's not necessarily always formalised as in the prayers. So, I used to do a lot of driving, so I spent a lot of time praying in the car. I really connect with God in nature.

So, again, walking the dog, not always easy. You know, I love talking to people on dog walks as well. So, sometimes that gets interrupted or the dog runs off. So, that's not always ideal. I think one of the challenges for me is interruptions.

So, if at home, you know, with the girls, even the dog, you know, I do get interrupted a lot. You know, that whole thing of praying in bed at night, you know, dear God, and then you fast asleep.

Because, you know, it's been a lot. I really like some of the apps. I really like the Pray As You Go app, which is between 12 or 16 minutes. You know, you can always fit that in. Yeah, that's doable.

Yeah. I really like some of the Ignatian spirituality. Okay. That's very reflective. It might be that you put yourself in, you know, you kind of use your imagination with a Bible passage.

[22 : 43] Or you do the exam and where you do it at the end of the day or the end of the week. And, you know, where did God show up? Yeah. Where did you not sense God? So, looking back over the week, saying, where was God most present in our understanding?

Yeah. And where was there? A distance, perhaps. Yeah, doing some reflection on that. And it's sometimes surprising when you actually stop to think about that. And there's kind of youth and children's versions of that that are quite nice to do.

Brilliant. Brilliant. All right. Last question then. And following on from that one. You mentioned funerals already. And we can pray for those. How can we pray for and support you, but also Claudia and Saran, as you begin this new season of work life, family life, home life, life with us?

What's the big prayers you would ask for? I think the prayers are just about us settling well, really. And, you know, certainly for me and Saran, it's new starts. We're getting there with the house.

We're almost there. But still, you know, still not 100% settled. Any, what, two weeks ago? Any move? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So, yeah, just pray that, yeah, that we settle well. I think we already feel at home.

[23 : 52] There's no issues there. Yeah. And just pray that God walks close to us in this season. Brilliant. Yeah. All right. Great. Thank you.