

# Ministry, disability and art

Emma Major, licensed lay minister

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01:00:05,000 --> 01:00:06,800

Good morning Emma.

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01:00:06,800 --> 01:00:08,039

Morning, Katie!

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01:00:08,039 --> 01:00:09,639

How are you?

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01:00:09,639 --> 01:00:10,920

I'm good, how are you?

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01:00:10,920 --> 01:00:15,679

I'm good too, and I'm really glad that you can join us today, and I'm really glad we haven't got commute anywhere

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01:00:15,679 --> 01:00:24,159

we can do it all via camera, it's so much easier! So this interview. We want to know a little bit about you and life

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01:00:24,159 --> 01:00:31,679

and health and ministry and art and how they all come together. So let's start with life. Tell us who is Emma?

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01:00:31,679 --> 01:00:41,440

So. Hi Emma, I'm married to Mike. We've been married nearly 25 years. We met at Manchester University.

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We were both studying as engineers. Manchester is the most amazing place. Yeah and so we met in Manchester,

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I then went to Birmingham to do project management and we landed somehow in Reading,

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'cause that's the midpoint of where our jobs ended us up.

And we've been here yeah, 20-25 years

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quarter of a century, oh Gee, I don't feel that old, that's not possible, is it?

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And then I realise we've got a 16 year old daughter.

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01:01:11,519 --> 01:01:12,880

Oh, she's 16!

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So I worked as an engineer, a project manager value and risk manager until she came along

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01:01:22,639 --> 01:01:31,440

and then I had what I now know is a calling into ministry, but at the time I was absolutely sure

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was a calling maybe into counselling. Did a degree in psychology when she was between birth and three

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01:01:40,519 --> 01:01:45,719

because that's obviously what new mums do. I mean honestly!

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And then finally listened when everyone says it's a call

into ministry, Emma, really it is.

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01:01:51,400 --> 01:01:58,199

So I obviously went to my vicar and said this is nonsense, isn't it? And he said no.

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And I went to vocations advisors and they agreed with my vicar. I cried a lot, essentially accepted

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01:02:06,719 --> 01:02:10,159

that I was having a calling into licenced lay ministry.

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01:02:10,159 --> 01:02:14,079

Excellent, and that is the jargon here isn't it, LLM licenced lay ministry,

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01:02:14,079 --> 01:02:20,840

which means that as a layperson you have a particular calling on you to exercise a particular ministry.

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Absolutely. So preaching, teaching and pastoral care are the three sections of lay ministry

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01:02:28,519 --> 01:02:35,119

and I trained and realised in training I was definitely not fitting in the box.

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01:02:35,119 --> 01:02:40,760

I mean, I've never fit in any box in my life, let's be clear, but this wasn't working

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01:02:40,760 --> 01:02:45,840

and I wasn't sure where I was sitting. I felt really called to outside the church to people

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01:02:45,840 --> 01:02:51,239

who would never even deem to step foot in the church, and over the next few years,

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01:02:51,239 --> 01:02:54,559

I realised there was this thing called pioneering and I was a pioneer. So out there rather than in here.

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01:02:54,559 --> 01:02:57,199

So out there rather than in here.

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Out there meeting people who think church is a bit of a strange place.

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01:03:02,559 --> 01:03:05,480

Well, even more strange than sometimes we might think it is.

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01:03:05,480 --> 01:03:12,280

Indeed. And how about how about health? Because I know that your health,

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01:03:12,280 --> 01:03:16,760

I guess when you made your marriage vows, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, like we all do,

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01:03:16,760 --> 01:03:22,159

we make them not having any clear what that might actually mean in the future. So how has health been for you?

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01:03:22,159 --> 01:03:30,760

So well, 3-4 years into pioneering, I got up from the sofa one evening and said to Mike, I feel funny.

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01:03:30,760 --> 01:03:35,920

And by the time I got to the top of the stairs was blind.

That was quite shocking.

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01:03:37,239 --> 01:03:44,960

So I'm not cool. I am legally blind, but as with most people who are legally blind, I have a bit of sight.

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01:03:44,960 --> 01:03:47,960

I have a small tunnel of blurry vision out of my right eye.

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And then over the next year lost most of my mobility, so I'm the dangerous creature that is a blind wheelchair driver.

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You've got a great power chair though.

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01:03:58,239 --> 01:04:06,920

I have a great power chair and I have amazing people around me who support me, and I don't let things stop me.

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01:04:06,920 --> 01:04:12,800

So that was a huge, uh, adapt...

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01:04:12,800 --> 01:04:14,000

Adjustment?

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01:04:14,000 --> 01:04:21,559

That's the word I'm looking for! And the reason my words go  
is because despite shielding, I caught COVID.

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01:04:21,559 --> 01:04:29,119

Thankfully survived COVID, but now have long COVID so it's  
an exciting life I'm leading.

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01:04:29,119 --> 01:04:35,519

You got the bingo card of chronic illness, haven't you? I  
mean, you're doing very well, top line's filled in  
beautifully.

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01:04:35,519 --> 01:04:42,079

So on a day to day basis, if people are trying to understand  
kind of what a day a typical day or an average day,

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01:04:42,079 --> 01:04:47,599

I know there probably isn't one but go with me, a typical  
day might look like just for you as Emma,

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away from from ministry for a minute. What might that look like?

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01:04:52,280 --> 01:05:02,119

Now with long COVID, that's 20 hours a day laid down. And even now I've got my feet up.

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01:05:02,119 --> 01:05:10,000

I'm reclined because if I sit up straight I lose my oxygen levels. I become massively fatigued

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exhaustion I've never experienced. Laid down I'm still creating, so I'm a creative person,

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01:05:19,000 --> 01:05:27,599

and I spend all my time laid down. I do a lot of reading, listening to books, but I love to write lots of poetry

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01:05:27,599 --> 01:05:31,159

and I paint on my iPad, which I love.

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01:05:31,159 --> 01:05:37,239

And you are quite famous for your art. Yes, you are famous.

Go on name drop, name drop.

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01:05:37,239 --> 01:05:38,760

Name drop!

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01:05:38,760 --> 01:05:40,719

Yes, you've been on TV!

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01:05:40,719 --> 01:05:45,599

Oh, I suppose I have. Well, yes, Grayson Perry. I mean that was the most amazing experience

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01:05:45,599 --> 01:05:53,239

and that was before I caught COVID and the, well, experience of speaking to Grayson about what it's like

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01:05:53,239 --> 01:06:00,639

being a blind person and loving art was amazing, and he spoke about creating because you love it

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01:06:00,639 --> 01:06:07,880

and naming - he said you are an artist. Name yourself as an artist and keep doing it because you love it

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01:06:07,880 --> 01:06:13,559

and it will speak to people. And when I caught COVID that really stuck with me.

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01:06:13,559 --> 01:06:17,400

I was creating in the hospital. Tthe hospital thought this was amazing.

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01:06:17,400 --> 01:06:26,880

And that affirmation that we're all creative. We all have something to share, and to do it for ourselves.

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I mean, that's the reason I create. It's for me.

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01:06:30,199 --> 01:06:36,239

Now there are some folks out there not in the conference 'cause we're all fabulous,

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01:06:36,239 --> 01:06:44,599

but there are some folk out there in the wider society who struggle with the idea that we can be disabled

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01:06:44,599 --> 01:06:50,559

or have chronic conditions, however, we want to describe ourselves, but also have ministry.

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01:06:50,559 --> 01:06:58,320

And that one doesn't need fixing or curing in order to do the other. So you can be blind,

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01:06:58,320 --> 01:07:04,840

you can have long COVID, you can live with all the various things that you live with, and have a genuine ministry.

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01:07:04,840 --> 01:07:11,199

They would say, surely you want to fix those medically before you can be of use as a minister.

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01:07:11,199 --> 01:07:16,480

And in my case, cerebral palsy surely gets in the way. How can you be a priest with cerebral palsy?

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01:07:16,480 --> 01:07:25,800

So how have you brought the two together in terms of arts and ministry and disability and chronic illness?

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That's a massive question.

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Good luck!

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01:07:30,400 --> 01:07:32,280

Thank you.

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01:07:32,280 --> 01:07:41,639

Wrestling with ministry right at the very start was all for me about being affirmed

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01:07:41,639 --> 01:07:47,559

that God was calling me for me. And that has struck me all the way through

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01:07:47,559 --> 01:07:54,280

and I was when I first lost my sight and became disabled, the amazing Bishop Andrew was so affirming

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01:07:54,280 --> 01:07:59,639

my vicar was affirming. You are called for you. God knows what you're going through.

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01:07:59,639 --> 01:08:04,519

God always knew what you were going to go through. God is beside you. God is leading you.

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01:08:04,519 --> 01:08:09,280

And I just keep that in mind. It's not what I do, it's who I am

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01:08:09,280 --> 01:08:14,679

and I'm not sure how I'd get through any of it without God, and I want to share that,

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01:08:14,679 --> 01:08:22,520

and I believe sharing that is a huge part of my ministry, to be able to say to people, yeah,

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01:08:22,520 --> 01:08:27,720

life is really rubbish. I mean, let's be clear, it is hugely rubbish at times.

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But I feel so loved by God. I feel inspired by God and I know God is there,

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loving everyone who's in need and feeling desperate or hurt  
or just as if they're missing something.

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01:08:43,479 --> 01:08:51,319

And lots of people in the world struggle. So to have  
somebody who is in ministry struggling

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01:08:51,319 --> 01:08:58,119

speaks to them that they are good enough and loved and  
wanted.

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01:08:58,119 --> 01:09:06,319

So here's a curveball question for you. Supposing - have you  
seen the Matrix film where there's the blue pill and the  
red pill,

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01:09:06,319 --> 01:09:14,960

and one of them is stay exactly as you are and the other one  
is everything changes and becomes a different story.

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01:09:14,960 --> 01:09:20,399

Supposing you have that choice, you went to bed tonight and  
God whispered in your ear,

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01:09:20,399 --> 01:09:25,920

tomorrow morning you can wake up as you are or tomorrow  
morning you can wake up

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01:09:25,920 --> 01:09:29,960

and be able to see again, to sit up again without the oxygen  
problems,

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01:09:29,960 --> 01:09:37,479

maybe the long COVID is a different question from  
disability, but to actually go back to your pre- blind life,

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01:09:37,479 --> 01:09:41,239

what do you think your reaction might be?

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01:09:41,239 --> 01:09:47,840

If it meant everything I've learned and everything I'd  
gained and all the healing of my soul

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01:09:47,840 --> 01:09:59,239

went away with my sight loss, then absolutely not. It  
happens to lots of us disabled people,

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01:09:59,239 --> 01:10:07,479

people on the street offering to pray for us and we'll be healed. And I say wait a minute, I am healed.

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01:10:07,479 --> 01:10:16,159

God has been with me every step of the way. I was healed of the grief of it. I was healed of the anger of it.

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01:10:16,159 --> 01:10:25,520

I'm so much calmer, closer to God, so much more centred. I value life so much more.

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01:10:25,520 --> 01:10:31,039

It may seem slower and less, but actually it's richer and deeper.

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01:10:31,039 --> 01:10:35,399

I would not go back to how I was.

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01:10:35,399 --> 01:10:41,920

And that is a good note to end on from my point of view, so I'm going to say Emma, thank you so much

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01:10:41,920 --> 01:10:49,520

for giving us this bit of time and letting us have just a  
glimpse into your life and your ministry and your faith.

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01:10:49,520 --> 01:10:50,840

So thank you for being with us.

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01:10:50,840 --> 01:10:51,720

Thank you.