

The tattooed priest bringing rock 'n God to North Wales

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The Revd George Bearwood is anything but your typical priest. To start with, he's more of a Judas Priest than Judas Iscariot. And from his rock 'n roll beginnings in the music industry George's is set to take North Wales by storm as Pioneer Priest in Holyhead Ministry Area.

George started as a musician playing in bands in the mid 70's. His passion for rock music has continued and, alongside his priest role, he hosts a Christian Rock show on Total Rock Radio. As a music producer and remixer, George worked with British pop acts Big Fun and Ant and Dec, German singer Nina Hagen, and techno-punk act Bent USA before composing music for Discovery Channel and Discovery Science.

Having spent decades living and working globally, with stints in London, Berlin, Osaka, and Los Angeles, George retired at 40 and opened a tattoo shop in London. Later he became a full time auctioneer with his own auction house in Ross on Wye and a collectibles dealer with a shop in Gloucestershire. But beneath the ink and the rockstar persona lies a profound commitment to his faith and a desire to connect with people in unexpected and meaningful ways.

With a passion for horror films and theology, George is on a mission to connect with the community, using his life experiences to bring faith to those who might not find it through traditional paths.

"I think it is very difficult to pinpoint what inspires anyone to pursue a calling to ministry," says George. "But I suppose for me it was that despite my successes in my previous careers, I always felt something was missing, a potential that I wasn't fulfilling, and that drew me initially into the church, which of course led me to where I am now."

Ordained in 2020, George sees his new role as pioneer priest as an opportunity to reach out to those who might not usually find themselves in church, using his unique life experiences to bridge the gap between contemporary culture and Christian faith.

"My background and my faith journey are quite unusual. I'm often told that I'm not your usual vicar. Bringing other people to know how God can truly change their lives allows me to meet them where they are, at whatever stage in their faith journey that might be.

Looking ahead to his move to Holyhead, George says, "Many people in the towns and villages in the Bro Cybi Ministry Area may have a strong faith, some faith or no faith and I believe that engaging with those people to share our faith is important, and we do that best when we allow God to utilise our life experiences.

"There are people today who have very little knowledge of the Christian faith. Some have never entered a church but I do know that people often think about faith whether they know it or not; through movies, literature and music. They already connect with God, they just don't know it yet.

"My role hopefully means I can be that link between contemporary life and a living faith and I do feel very blessed to be able to do that."

Whether it's through his Spooky HaT Club—a horror and theology film group —or simply by being a non-judgmental, open-hearted presence in the community, George is determined to bring the message of Christ's love to everyone, no matter where they are on their spiritual journey.

"Horror movies by their very nature are all about theology. At their most basic level it's about good overcoming evil but quite often the faith messages in these films are deeper and more elaborate than that.

"What may appear to be on the surface 'a tacky bloodbath' can also have quite a lot to say about the nature of salvation or the possibility of redemption. These films work on many levels. They can be cheap, sensational entertainment aimed at a certain demographic but you only have to scratch the surface to find a wealth of theological and philosophical ideas just waiting to be explored."

Counting Hammer Horror films and A Nightmare on Elm Street franchise among his favorites, George has seen firsthand how horror films can inspire someone's faith journey. Members of the Spooky HaT horror and theology group have started attending church. "It has been a great success and has brought a few of the club attendees into church every Sunday with one person now helping out on Sundays.

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“None of the members were churchgoers before and would have said that they had little or no views on faith. But firmly believe, if handled well and with sensitivity, horror film discussions can be used to open people's hearts to faith and lead them to a true relationship with God.”

George's wife, Canon Alex Mayes, also serves as a priest and was recently appointed as Director of Ministry for the Diocese of Bangor. As Revd George prepares for his new role in Holyhead, he brings with him a breath of fresh air, a touch of the unconventional, and a message of faith that's as vibrant and dynamic as the man himself.

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