



ALL PICTURES © JIM GROVER

God is in the detail

Jim Grover's photo essay follows the life of a C of E vicar, providing an insight into his work in urban London. **Karen Sheard** finds out more

What made you interested in photographing the life of a London vicar?

I wanted to find a subject that could form the basis of a year-long, in-depth photo story that fulfilled two criteria – to be on my doorstep and to

involve people. My local vicar, Kit Gunasekera, ticked both those boxes as his vicarage backs on to our garden and his ministry is all about people.

I wanted to show what the Church of England ministry is all about in London today.

What it is like being a minister, what happens beyond the Sunday service that we all know about, how ministers spend their time and fulfil their roles, the challenges and opportunities they face, and, most importantly the difference they can make to people in local communities.

How did you choose Kit in particular as the subject of this body of work?

At the outset I was drawn to Kit's ministry, and thus the role that he fulfils. I'd only met him once before as a result of our respective cats! I approached him in his church, which I had never visited before, and asked him if I could shadow him with a camera for a year and tell the story of his ministry in Clapham. It was a totally unexpected request for Kit and quite an ask really (imagine if a stranger asked you that). Luckily he said 'yes'.

Can you tell us a little about the time you spent with Kit, such as how often you visited him and travelled around with him?

Over the course of 14 months I spent 63 days with him (although I shot additional context images on days beyond these). In terms of the logistics, I needed to work around my day job (I work part-time as a consultant). So Kit would let me know in advance some of the things he was planning to do in the forthcoming week or so, and I'd see which ones I could join.

In terms of approach, I wanted to stay true to reportage. Thus, I asked Kit to ignore my presence and to minister as though I wasn't there. I also chose not to share the images I'd captured as I didn't want there to be any risk of Kit becoming complicit in any way. I did share some of the earlier images so that he could see the sorts of things I was 'seeing' and to build his trust.

Did you have a plan beforehand of what elements of his work you wanted to show?

Not really. The original theme I agreed with Kit was very broad: 'A year of Kit's ministry'.



1 Kit visits the bed-bound Florin in her home and blesses her as part of a personal Holy Communion service

2 The Young at Heart group meet on Thursdays. They knit, chat and have tea together. Kit often joins them and leads them in some music and prayers

3 As part of the Stations of the Cross ceremony, Kit carries a cross along Bedford Avenue in Clapham, South London, on Good Friday

4 Taken on one of the regular quiz nights – cod and chips for table five

5 Every morning Kit sets aside half an hour to pray, read the Bible, reflect and fill in his daily journal

I knew nothing about 'ministry', so it was a matter of learning and experiencing. I deliberately kept an open mind about the final story I wanted to tell.

For me, the project was more about seeking to bring to life through images of what ministry is all about – the everyday life of a minister beyond the things that we identify with them (marriages, funerals and Sunday services, for example).

As part of this project I also analysed Kit's diary over the course of the year. Thus he attended (and mostly led) 110 church services during the year, but he also carried out 114 ministry roles including care-home visits, pastoral visits to parishioners in their homes or hospitals and other community events. I have learned that there is so much more to ministry than the church services with which we all identify.

For you, what are most notable elements about the work that Kit does? One of the aspects of the role that Kit finds most fulfilling is

his pastoral visits – visiting those in need in their homes, hospitals or care homes. And having accompanied Kit on many of these, I have seen the huge difference that they make.

Imagine you are in need and you have faith. Kit comes to you. He chats, he reads the Bible, he prays with you, he may sing to you, he gives you Communion. He gives you his undivided attention, time and love. When Kit leaves, the recipient is emotionally stronger, sometimes quite visibly, than when he arrived. What a wonderful gift to be able to give. Many leaders would love to be able to make such a profound impact on those they lead.

Your subjects sometimes include people in private or vulnerable situations, such as those in hospital or praying. Were people happy for you to photograph them at these moments?

I was fortunate enough to establish the trust and confidence of those who Kit ministers to, and often with the very briefest of

explanations, either by Kit or myself. I know that I am a very sensitive photographer, I always seek to be empathetic and understanding, and that probably helps build trust. I also genuinely love talking with people, hearing their stories and learning about their lives – and in my experience that also goes a long way to building trust and confidence.

Many images seem to be done with sensitivity, such as where Kit visits a sick patient, and you show only the hand of the patient. Did you make any conscious decisions about how you would approach taking these types of shots?

There was no planning involved – there couldn't be, given the reportage nature of the work. Thus, I never knew what I was going to experience

or see on my travels with Kit around his parish, and that is what made the experience so challenging and rewarding. What I always sought to do was to tell the story of Kit's ministry, and the relationship he had with the individuals he was ministering to.

But I knew I was also participating in some very intense and intimate moments, and respected these accordingly. Even though I was using a Leica rangefinder with a very quiet shutter, I would tend not to shoot during a prayer with an individual in their home (instead I waited for the 'Amen' moment). There was a time when a parishioner broke down in tears with Kit. It would have made for some incredibly powerful images, but I put my camera down as it just didn't feel right.



Jim is a photographer who has been recognised in various competitions including the Sony World Photography Awards. In 2015 he won the Faith Through a Lens photography competition (in which photojournalist and documentary photographer Don McCullin was a judge). His photographs have frequently appeared in national publications.