

Don't judge a cleric by their dog collar!

Rev Robert Avery is the Vicar of the Church of King Charles the Martyr in Tunbridge Wells, Kent.



there is no clear subject in the photo. Photography is about simplifying things. The image should be clear and draw people in. The temptation is to include everything but there are some simple steps to taking a good photo. For example, you must be clear about your subject, use the technology well (make sure your focus is right) make sure your composition is as you want it to be and check the lighting. It's difficult to take a good landscape photo when there is flat overhead light in the middle of the day.

Photography for me is about taking something ordinary and making it look extraordinary.

That Perfect Moment.

Keen photographer and father of two Rev Robert Avery is the parish priest of King Charles the Martyr in Tunbridge Wells.

Ordained immediately after graduating from Cambridge with a degree in Theology, photography allows Robert to combine his passion for photographing landscapes and striking architecture with his faith.

He said, "I was interested in photography as a teenager, and my Dad gave me a Zenith E camera. It was a pretty crude, manual SLR and I really enjoyed it! Back then, developing each shot was expensive and I was never really interested in developing my own images."

A parish priest for over 22 years, Robert is also very interested in music technology and he plays the keyboard. With a young family and a large parish to look after, he temporarily shelved his interest in photography until about 8 years ago. He said, "I was going on a trip to the Holy Land and I wanted photos I could share with others, so I bought a better point and shoot, which reignited my love of the process."

Like most creative pastimes, photography requires a lot of dedicated time. Robert said, "A photograph is a mix of creative composition; you have to combine the artistry of it with the technology. The mistake a lot of people make is that

Timing can be everything; just to catch an expression at the right moment or capture a particular action. It's about that perfect moment and you can be lucky."

Robert likes to go out on photography trips when he can, and acknowledges that sometimes, even a well-planned trip can be disappointing. He said, "Some professional photographers say maybe 1 in 4 trips will give you a really great 'keeper' – an image that is outstanding. Wedding photographers can take around 1,400 images and only keep 200 from which the bride and groom will choose a handful to keep."

Having been caught without a camera once or twice, and

missed a lovely landscape shot because of it, Robert generally carries a small Fuji digital SLR with a 35mm lens with him. The rest of the time he uses a Canon DSLR. He said, "There's a danger that photographers see the whole world through a lens but photographers need to look behind themselves to see what they are missing."

You need to create beauty not just respond to it. For me, taking photos is quite a contemplative thing and it allows me to see the wonders of God's creation and the design of the world.

In the Christian faith, each person is a child of God. It's like that every day."

Choosing landscapes over portraits, Robert is very interested in texture. He favours black and white photography for patterns and tonality. Tree bark and images of stretches of water test Robert's technical expertise, especially when he is seeking the perfect lighting conditions to create mood. He is also keen on macro photography, taking interesting pictures of things like ladybirds on flowers saying, "You can see things that you wouldn't normally see. The depth and complexity of God's world is wondrous."

Constantly learning about photography, Robert said, "The distinctiveness of people's personalities comes through in what they do. Creative people are very generous. You can learn a lot from looking at other people's work. There is a lot on line and you can look at the images and ask yourself, 'why do I like that?' and 'what's good about that?' I have always been self-taught and have never been on courses. I read a lot about photography and there is a lot of information on-line. On-line videos are a great way of learning and you can just pay a monthly subscription to the sites you are interested in. I sometimes wish I had been a full-time professional photographer, but it's a tough



business and a hard place to earn a living now. I also think that maybe if you are a professional, you lose some of the creativity because you are working to someone else's direction." God is always part of the picture for Robert. He said,

"Part of photography is about responding to the depth and beauty of the things around us and seeking to go beyond the superficial. God expresses His creativity through us; our creativity is His."

"He involves us in the enterprise. Our skills and gifts are part of that. I think some of the key theological ideas or categories are important – like light and time. Photography can stop time and God is eternal. We can compress time with a long exposure and in a curious way, this allows us to step outside time analogous to the way God sees His world." Modest about his achievements, Robert doesn't usually publish his photography. He would like to become a better photographer and to travel more, but he readily acknowledges that life as a parish priest may not lend itself to travel very well. He is pragmatic about it, saying, "You don't need to go far – just walk around your

town. The challenge is that with painting, people recognise that a good image takes hours and hours. Photography is the same; taking a really good image is a rarity, but people do recognise a good photo when they see it." Next time you see a lone figure gazing intently at the sky in Hastings, look again – he could be your local parish priest enjoying some well-earned time off!

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