

Patrick Moriarty,
headteacher of JCoSS, has been
ordained as a deacon

Mazel tov, Reverend

BY SUSAN REUBEN

LYING ON JCoSS headmaster Patrick Moriarty's desk are a pair of socks and a set of cufflinks, each saying 'Trust me — I'm a vicar'. Two days before I visited him, he was ordained as a deacon, and these are a congratulations present from his staff. Moriarty began as deputy headteacher of the pluralist Jewish secondary school when it opened in 2010, having come from Haberdashers' Aske's School for Girls. He was then promoted to headteacher in 2012. After five years in the role, he has overseen the introduction of the new sixth form, and the first set of students to travel all the way through the school has graduated.

Entering the church might seem, at first glance, like a curious second career for the leader of a Jewish school. I ask him whether he felt that being JCoSS headmaster was not taking up enough of his time.

He laughs. "It's a crazy thing to do," he admits. "All I can say is, in my first three years I am a non-stipendiary — completely unpaid — and therefore I can kind of do whatever I can do. I have a very understanding supervisor — the vicar of the parish. He's quite clear that this is a one-day-a-week job and that is fine."

He pauses. "But the real answer is, it doesn't make any sense to try and fit it in around my 70-hour week — but if that is the



Patrick Moriarty
(front right) at
his ordination
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Moriarty grew up in a traditional Anglican family, attending church every Sunday. His parents took an active role in church life: "My mother was on the General Synod and my father was a church commissioner."

The idea of becoming a priest first came to him in his teens: "I've spent 35 years saying, 'I'm not sure if this is right, let me just test it out, let's try and push it away and see whether it comes back.' It's a bit like when you want to convert to Judaism and you have to be pushed away three times to see whether it's for you or not."

Moriarty will spend his first year as a deacon — it's a sort of apprenticeship. He is aware of a challenging dichotomy between his two roles of minister and headmaster: "The point of being a deacon is it's absolutely a role of service — you're entitled to nothing. You are a servant of the community. Whereas my job at JCoSS is to be sitting at the top of a hierarchy. So trying to combine those in the course of a week — to let one inform the other — that's going to be the voyage of this coming year. How to hold together those two so that the servant bit is not being a doormat and the leadership bit is not being a bully."

Are there ways in which running a Jewish school enhances his vocation as an Anglican minister? He concurs enthusiastically. "I can't hear — and I love this fact — I can no longer hear Christian liturgy or Christian bible texts without thinking of what they would sound and feel like to a Jewish audience. If you're going to understand the story of the Crucifixion — if you don't know all the antecedent symbolism in Yom Kippur, in Pesach, you're just not going to have a clue what's going on. Firstly there's story of sin and how we process and deal with it, and put ourselves right with our neighbours and with God, and secondly there's the process of how we articulate liberation and all that means for the things that bind us and hold us back. That's what makes the Jesus story so interesting."

And what about the cultural aspects of the Jewish world. How does he relate to them? "Sitting where I do, I see overwhelmingly the positives," he says. "One of the things I criticise about Jesus — and I do so very tongue-in-cheek — is that he comes along and says, 'OK, I'm going to broaden the definition of God's People so it's no longer about who is in Abraham's family. The People is now redefined in terms

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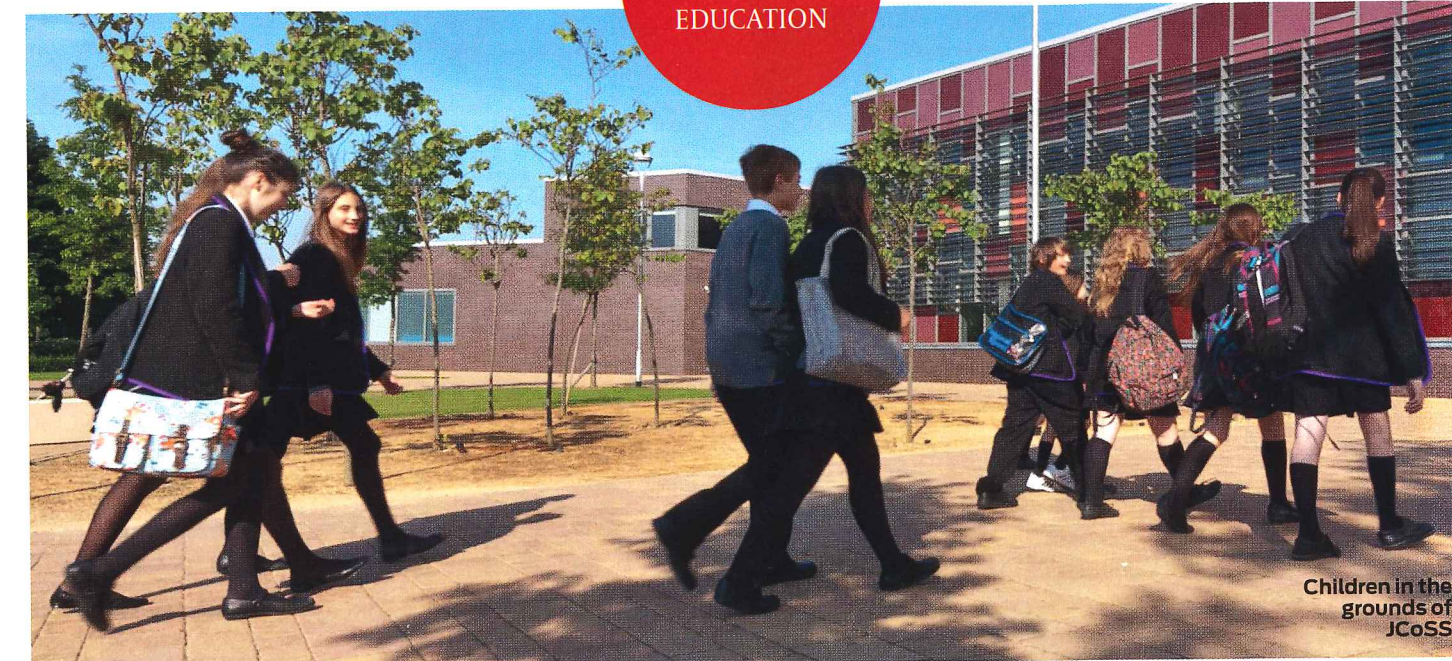
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Children in the grounds of JCoSS

of faith, and the faith can be shared by anyone.' That's an absolutely glorious vision of inclusion — but it's not actually really taking full account of human nature, which is to say we start with our kin. We start with people for whom we have a real family connection.

"The Jews are a clan — in the best possible sense and in the not-quite-so-good sense. . . they're a sort-of tribal people. We've already had a conversation where you've said, 'I know this person and this person,' and I've said 'Oh yes, I've taught that one and I know that one.' There's a sense of — community doesn't quite do it justice — because it is extended family — it's tribe, it's clan. That does not exist in the Church of England."

So what is the 'not-quite-so-good sense'? "That sense of, we're in this together and whatever our differences, come push to shove we will stick together. It's positive and negative. Because on the flip side it can look like a little club of the self serving who will give to their own community and not give elsewhere — but I have never found that to be the case in my own experience."

Moriarty explains that this living between two worlds completely suits him. Leading a church school would be a much more obvious thing to do, but has very little appeal: "I think where I'm really comfortable is in a liminal space where there's a foot in more than one camp, and the creative tension and possibilities that that sends up are really exciting. Besides, anything I get right about Judaism, people say, 'Goodness me, how amazing that you would know that!' Of course I know it, because I've studied it for all these years, but I keep quiet about that!"

"Can we talk about the Church of the Holy Sepulchre?" he asks me, suddenly.

"Um. . . yes?" I say, slightly surprised.

"So, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is the church in Jerusalem allegedly built over the site where the Crucifixion happened, and also where Jesus's tomb was and where the Resurrection happened. Inside this church are numerous chapels. The Catholics have got one, the Ethiopian Orthodox have got one and

Patrick Moriarty at his ordination

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the Greek Orthodox and the Franciscans. The question is, who locks up the building at the end of the day? And for centuries, the key has been held by a Muslim family so that they are totally separate from all the denominational disputes.

"I think part of what's been lovely and part of what's worked for JCoSS in the past five years is that I've been like the Muslim keyholder to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre — not in any one of the denominations."

Moriarty feels that this role as the 'Muslim keyholder' is particularly helpful for the pluralist ethos of the school:

"There's a danger that people will say, 'Ah it's not really a pluralist school. It's really a Reform school or really an Orthodox school.' It's a lot easier with me in charge — it can never really be nailed to one place or another."

Has he ever experienced any kind of backlash from parents who feel that the head of JCoSS should be Jewish? "Really, no," he replies. "There was just one occasion that tells its own story. It was a small parents' open morning. There was a parent (not a JCoSS parent at that stage) who asked that question in a very tentative sort of way. 'Don't you think that. . . well, I'm not quite sure how to put this. . . that maybe. . . there are things about running a Jewish school you only kind of really get if you are Jewish?' The reaction of all the other parents was, actually, just shut up — you do not know what you are talking about. They rounded on this person in my defense and I just smiled and said nothing at all."

Moriarty combines serious erudition and deep thoughtfulness with a kind of boyish enthusiasm. It's a disarming mixture. "All these big, religious questions — you have them in really interesting and fresh ways when you've got two different perspectives," he says. "What is the nature of truth? Are all religions the same? Is it the same God? How do we think about death? How do we think about suffering? How do we think about joy? What is freedom? I think

it's a real gift. A gift to me is what I mean. There's a kind of playfulness to it and I think that's part of what, on a purely personal level, motivates me. I need to be in a place where I can be a little bit playful." ■