

I was born in Lambeth in 1950 “within the sound of Bow Bells”, but lived most of my early life in Dagenham, East London. I was brought up in a caring and secure working-class home but my parents had no particular religious allegiance, even though, as baptised C of E, I was given an unproductive exposure to Christianity through Sunday school and state education. In Dagenham in those days Catholics were “them” and we were “us”. I managed to pass the eleven-plus and obtain an education at Beal Grammar School in Ilford before studying Economics at the City University, London. However, my continuing search for meaning in life (outside football!) made very little progress until I met my future wife Elaine in 1970 – a north Nottinghamshire girl and then a recent convert to Catholicism.

Elaine and I married in 1973 and we settled in the Good Shepherd parish. It was not until our first child was baptised that God gave me the grace to put aside my doubts and prejudices and I was received into the Church on 21 February 1975, after instruction by Fathers Owen O’Neill and Jim Cahill. I felt impelled to put my newfound faith into practice and I quickly became active in the parish including a long spell in the St Vincent de Paul Society. Bernard Kirwin and Frank Cordes were strong early male influences in helping me understand how Catholics should practice their faith. My activity in the Church steadily ramped up whilst, at this same time, I had a growing family - finally one of five girls and two boys. All our children attended the Good Shepherd School and we had at least one child there for twenty-six years – I was a governor at the school for nine of them. Moreover, also at this time during the eighties and nineties, I held a variety of senior management positions in the electricity supply industry – with East Midlands Electricity Board (later plc) and Powergen.

I discovered the Diaconate in 1993 but hardly a day then went by without me asking God to tell me whether He was calling me or I was calling myself. It was clear that I could not be an active servant of the Church and be full-time employed but I could not be sure that I was not simply trying to take activity to a higher level. However, in 1999 I felt that God finally gave me some sort of answer, when I was able to negotiate a favourable package that enabled me to leave work and yet be self-supporting. Nevertheless the years up to ordination on 4 February 2006 tested my vocation to a degree I had never anticipated. It made me listen more to God than to my own plans, to begin to put more of my trust in Him than in myself. It also made me recognise the primacy of praying and being rather than in always doing.

With two children still at university, and now a grandparent, my first and primary vocation as a husband and father remains very much who I am. God has blessed me with my wife, family and faith and as a Deacon I have tried to give some service back to Him in return. What do I do as a Deacon? Well, the word Diakonia means service and basically I try to do all that is put in front of me to do and not allow myself anymore to give way to my natural pro-activity. These include assisting in hospital chaplaincy visiting, baptisms, funeral services and regularly taking Holy Communion to a handful of parishioners that I have “acquired” along the way. I am largely self-taught in my faith and know what it means to be both with it and without it. I feel that I have a calling to preach and teach and I have been very grateful for the regular opportunities that each parish priest has given me with the former. On the altar the Deacon always proclaims the Gospel but I know I must live it by ministering person to person. Whenever I feel that my Diaconate has not turned out quite as expected, I think of all the good people I have had a chance of meeting during my ministry and thank God that, even if I have not helped save many souls, in His kindness He has given me a chance to save mine.

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