



When a priest first arrives in a parish, understandably people want to know all about him and the experience and background that he brings with him to the parish. It seems easier to try to provide that information in written form like this for those who may be interested (without “inflicting” it on those who aren’t!) as a way of answering everyone’s questions in one go, as it were. And so...

I was born in 1948 and grew up in Redcar – originally in the Sacred Heart parish - and went to St Mary’s College in Middlesbrough (1959-64) back in the days when it was the Marist grammar school. When I left school I worked for about five years as a lab technician, initially with Dorman-Long and then with ICI. I also became very involved in the establishment of the new parish of St Alban’s in Redcar and it was that involvement that first led me to consider a vocation

to priesthood and my first application to the diocese in 1969.

It was decided that I should go to the seminary at Osterley but, for various reasons, things didn’t really work out and, to give myself some time and space to decide “what next”, a friend suggested applying to a local lay-missionary organisation and I subsequently found myself at age 22 in the middle of Africa – in Zambia – teaching and coaching sports at a school staffed by American Jesuits and lay volunteers from the Oregon Province, where I ended up working for four years. Living in a Jesuit community had a considerable influence on my continuing experience of vocation and so, having applied to the Province, I began studies at their Portland novitiate in 1975. The year-and-a-half that I spent there as a novice was a tremendous experience for me. It included an introduction to Ignatian spirituality; took me to an Indian Reservation in Washington State where I worked in the parish and the Reservation school; I also worked for some time with patients and families attending a cancer research centre in Seattle which was pioneering the then very new process of bone marrow transplantation. However, something was still not quite settled in my mind and so I decided to discontinue my studies and returned to this country.

It was 1978 and the big attraction, work-wise, was the oil fields of the Middle East. My sports coaching in the heat of Africa got me a job in recreation management in a certain desert country that, for reasons that should become clear, I won’t name. I went there hoping to find “church” of some sort although, officially, Christian churches were banned. In the event, not only was there church, but during the five years that I was there most of my free time was spent organising and directing the catechetics programme in the company community parish. At the time I didn’t think I was still actively considering a vocation but, as they say, God works in mysterious ways and in one of the last places that I had expected to find church, church found me and kept me actively involved and on my journey, though at the time I didn’t really know it.

After five years in the desert I headed back to America, this time to Tampa, Florida, to do a degree in Social Sciences at the University of South Florida. I also became involved once again in catechetics in the parish where I was living. I graduated from USF in 1986 and, returning home with my bank account somewhat depleted by now having paid my own way through university, managed to find a job back in the Middle east again – same country, same type of work.

It was at this time, during a vacation break back home, that my parish priest asked me to call round for a chat. He was convinced for various reasons which I won't go into (lest it delay any further your reaching the end of this story!) that I should again give some serious consideration and prayer to the question of the priesthood and in the meantime to at least set the wheels in motion in terms of applying to the diocese. So it was then, that after coming home in 1988, I started at Ushaw College. Apart from all the usual academic studies, pastoral work involved me in hospital chaplaincy for a while and I also joined the religious broadcast team at Radio Cleveland helping to produce the "Sunday Breakfast" programme and gaining very useful media experience in the process. Part of my final year, as a deacon, was spent at St Wilfrid's in York.

I was ordained priest in July 1993 – Bishop Crowley's first ordination for the diocese - and was appointed as assistant at Christ the King, Thornaby. During the two years that I was there I also served as a prison chaplain. In 1995, I became priest-in-charge at St Peter's, South Bank, and was also asked to take on the ministry of port chaplain with the "Apostleship of the Sea". For a while I served on the Bishop's Council for Education and was also part of a group appointed by the bishop to look at sacramental preparation policy and practice in the diocese. In 1999 I was appointed as parish priest at St Andrew's, Teesville, in addition to my responsibilities at St Peter's, the two parishes eventually being amalgamated in January 2000 along with St Anne's, Eston, two years later. I was Chair of Governors at the primary and comprehensive schools and oversaw the amalgamation of two of the parish's primary schools. I also did a year as "in-store chaplain" at the local Asda supermarket.

After almost nine years in the South Bank/Teesville area, in 2005 I was appointed to St Hilda's in Whitby, another amalgamation - this time of three parishes: St Hilda's, St Patrick's (the church was then closed), and English Martyrs in neighbouring Sleights. St Hilda's is a huge triangular parish - though much of it is moorland - extending along the coast from Sandsend to the north, including Robin Hood's Bay and down to Ravenscar to the south, and inland to Goathland which is, of course, the fictional village of Aidensfield in the television series *Heartbeat*. Until I watched the programme, I didn't realise my parish was so full of rogues and criminal intrigue! For a while I was Catholic chaplain to the RAF base at Fylingdales, although strictly speaking it's just outside the parish, and more recently I was asked to become of a member of the diocese's Vocations Team. And that brings everything up-to-date.

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