

Dear Friends,

Many of you will know Luke as he has been worshipping at St Michael's for the last 18 months. He is married Erica and they have a daughter Amelie. So, having welcomed them to the church, we now welcome the news that Luke is now considering ordination as a Priest in the Church of England. He has described his journey below and with him, I ask that you remember him and the family in your prayers, especially as he begins ministering amongst us and across the Benefice, sharing in leading worship, preaching and assisting in Holy Communion.

Jesus is building his Church and it's a joy to be part of that, with Luke!

David

My Journey so far

I was born in South Africa in 1969 and grew up in an Anglican community consisting mostly of English, Scottish, Irish and Canadian immigrants. My mother was of Dutch descent and my father was an English speaker of German/Latin origin. I have two mother languages with my first being English and the second, Afrikaans. I had 4 siblings. Although I was born in a country known for its apartheid regime, I experienced very little of its ill effect at home where no form of discrimination was ever acceptable. I had a Sotho woman as nanny who lived in; she taught me to walk and she taught me about respect the African way. I loved her. Her children played with us and were part of our childhood; their colour was irrelevant. I was made aware that things "out there" were not necessarily the same as at home at a very young age when I told my father that I wanted Paulina to come with us to the park and he replied that, sadly, it wasn't possible. I wanted to know why and he had to explain that it was not allowed as it was a public place and black and white people were not allowed to mix. I was as disturbed by this as my father was. I didn't want to go to the park anymore and neither did he. We played at home where colour did not matter. The conviction in me was set that justice must be done.

My early years were spent at home with my mother and although she was what today would be termed a trauma medic with St Johns Ambulance, she did this voluntarily and described herself as a "housewife". From her I learnt unconditional love and empathy. Her home was an open, safe haven to everyone at all times; you could be sure of a warm welcome and an invitation to make yourself at home. Her life was shaped by her conviction that the only time you looked down on someone, was when you reached out to help them up. She never failed to remind me that friendliness and kindness, cost nothing.

My father was my best friend and also the superintendent of the biggest psychiatric hospital at the time. He served as the adviser on mental health to then Prime Minister, Hendrik Verwoerd and sat two seats away from him when he was assassinated in parliament. My father worked relentlessly on policies and ideals that would ultimately usher in changes worthy of the foundations on which a new South Africa could be built. He was a man who believed in no form of violence and was committed to finding solutions to all challenges through conversation. From him I learnt unconditional compassion for the human condition. I recall many a conversation with him from my earliest childhood during which he would observe "there but for the grace of God, go we". He also taught me to question everything including all authority and to only accept it as "truth" once I have examined it and made it my own. He instilled in me a deep sense that with "God in control it is for us to Let Go"; on his desk he had a little plaque "Let go and Let God". I still do.

Church was the central tenet around which my life revolved and, together with my parents and in particular one of my sisters, our priest (Uncle Roy) formed one of the 4 pillars of my life. He was to me the example of Christ's life and love as he "walked" with God, whilst being entirely human and approachable. I recall a moment that made a lasting impression on me; during an outbreak of scarlet fever in a lepers' colony, no one could be found to minister to them, but when he heard of this, he was ready to go. He was reprimanded by his family and the church for being irresponsible, but his reply instilled confidence: "when God calls, He grants protection. I am safe in His Will for me". He came back from a week in the colony, unscathed but "spiritually enriched". At a time when churches were not allowed to welcome people of different race or colour by law, he welcomed all and made no secret of it. He met the reality of a police cell on more than one occasion due his "breaking of the segregation laws", but eventually, police turned a blind eye as our church doors remained open to all.

By the time I was 6, it was clear to me that I would one day be a priest too and so my preparation began. I supported my father, who was also a deacon, with all preparation for communion. I sang in the choir with him and my formative years were spent in conversation with leading figures in our church. When I turned 16, I formally requested Uncle Roy to prepare my application for the theology college. By 18, I was ready to leave for Cambridge to study theology. But then, as strongly as I felt Christ's call all my life, I felt overwhelmed by a feeling that I was not ready. I dreaded the inevitable conversation with Uncle Roy fearing that he would be disappointed in me. I was met with the same tremendous love and understanding I felt familiar with when he reassured me "All is well. Christ's time is perfect and when the time comes for you to answer His call, you will be ready; there will be no uncertainty. You will still feel inadequate and too small to take on the task he requires of you, but you will also know that He will not call you and then abandon you to rely on your own strength". I went in search of certainty that what I heard was truly God's call and not merely a longing to emulate an extraordinary servant of God.

I studied music and was apprenticed to the National State Opera based in Pretoria and completed my practical year in Vienna. Music remains to this day, my stairway to heaven. As the opera house had closed on my return from Vienna due to a restructuring of government resources in 1994, I was again faced with the question. Is it time for me to respond to God's call? Again, I sought to explore further and chose to study law as I have always longed, and still long, for justice in its true sense in the world. I worked as solicitor in top firms until the day came when disillusioned I turned my back on full time legal practice. Justice, per se, is not found in the hallways of courts and corridors of power.

In 1997, my father died and then I met Camphill, an international Christian community in Cape Town where they live and work with adults with learning difficulties. The setting was idyllic; an organic farm on the west coast of South Africa with a number of houses where people were approached from a therapeutic perspective. No matter how "damaged" the body may be, the understanding was that the soul was undamaged. I joined the community and continue to work for Camphill till this day. (In 2000 I was asked to take on a house community in Milton Keynes and as I always knew that I would one day "come home", I was ready for my move within 2 months.

During my 23 years in Camphill, I also qualified as psychotherapist and therapeutic baker. Over the past 23 years, I was brought face to face with my call to the priesthood on another 2 occasions and each time something happened that prevented me from being able to start training and one of those moments included the illness of my beloved mother and her subsequent death. Two years ago we moved to the beautiful New Forest to be nearer to the Camphill Community in Ringwood where Amelie goes to school and Erika and I work. We came to visit St Michael's soon after we settled in to our home in Bartley and immediately felt at home and warmly welcomed here.

The question of ordained ministry that has lived with me all my life, raised itself again over the past months until I have now been brought to the point that Uncle Roy described all those years ago: "All is well. Christ's time is perfect and when the time comes for you to answer His call, you will be ready; there will be no uncertainty. You will still feel inadequate and too small to take on the task he requires of you, but you will also know that He will not call you and then abandon you to rely on your own strength".

It has taken me the best part of 40 years to prepare, and when I had a conversation with David a few weeks ago, he warned me that there was likely to be a challenge to my commitment to the call and likely to be in the form of other work offers that appear irresistible. He was right. I now have the option of taking up a registered manager position or return to full time law with all its financial advantages.

Yet I know, I can no longer resist the call. I know that the Christ that has always been my companion and Lord, continues to walk beside me and in me. Erika and Amelie are next to me too and support me.

I know my answer to Christ's call is not a mere personal matter. I understand that the congregation needs to share in my conviction and I welcome that. I would love to be more meaningfully involved in the life of the church here and have made practical arrangements at work to facilitate that.

All I can say, as I offer myself in answer to Christ's call, is to echo the words of the hymn that resounds in my heart: "Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord. I have heard your calling in the night. I will go Lord, if you lead me".

Luke Augustyn