

MY JOURNEY HERE



DAVID EDWARDS

BY GISELE MCKNIGHT

He is the Most Rev. David Edwards, bishop of the Diocese of Fredericton; and Metropolitan of the Province of Canada, which comes with the title of archbishop.

But he'd really rather be known as David.

How he got to New Brunswick is a winding story of God's hand on his life that began in 1960. David was born at the Wolverhampton Women's Hospital at 10:30 in the evening. His father did not turn up until the next evening.

"He worked all day. That's how they did it back then," said David, adding that his father still lives in the house David was brought home to as an infant.

David is an only child, born to Jack and Doreen who were in their 30s. His father spent most of his career as a caster in an iron foundry, though he served in the Royal Air Force near the end of the war, and in the post-war period in India and Singapore.

His mother learned to drive in the Land Army, an organization of women who worked the farms while the men were at war. She's 95 now, suffering from dementia, living in a nursing home. Jack is 92, and visits her twice a day, every day.

CHILDHOOD

David's father didn't go to church. His mother went occasionally.

"I was sent to Sunday school every Sunday from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m.," he said.

He joined youth group as a teenager, but it was a simple prayer in his community's library that changed the course of his life.

David, 15, had joined the camera club, which had a membership of three. His first meeting was in the library, and one of them suggested they begin with a prayer — a prayer that continues to guide David some 45

years later.

"I felt I was surrounded by a big ball of light," he said. "That was my conversion experience. Was it God? No question."

He never went back to the camera club, but the experience of that day has lasted a lifetime.

"I never really wavered," he said. "Whenever I think 'are we just doing something that doesn't make sense?' I always go back to that incident. If God was real then, he's real now."

UNIVERSITY

At 16, David was introduced to evangelism, and those who know him would say it still burns deeply within him.

"I went on a beach mission with Church Army," he said, adding from then on, he volunteered, got to know Church Army officers and was heavily involved. That's where he met Janet, his wife of 37 years.

At 18, David moved out of his family home to attend university, earning a combined honours degree in English and history. In 1981 he and Janet got married, and he attended Cambridge University for a post-graduate certificate in Education. By 1982, he was a teacher.

But did he really want to be a teacher?

"I wanted to be a lawyer," he said. "God wanted me to be a teacher. I was very convinced of that. I thought I'd be a Church Army officer."

In his early 20s, he submitted an application for ordained ministry. "I felt fairly confident that I was called to Church Army ministry, but I wanted to test the ordination track," he said, adding that many, including his home rector, had suggested he consider ordination.

But the answer was a resounding no. You have not suffered enough, they said.

"They were right," said David.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Janet & David at a Threshold Ministries (formerly Church Army) event in Saint John in 2016; Debbie and David on their wedding day in 2020; David in the UK in two photos; David and Janet early on in their marriage.



MCKNIGHT FILE PHOTOS



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

"There's no question that if I'd been selected for ordained ministry then, no matter how good or how bad I am now, had I been ordained then, I'd have been a terrible priest."

CAREER

So both he and Janet taught school and volunteered with Church Army. Then in 1986, he was selected to move from volunteer to officer, which meant leaving his teaching career. After the three-year training program at the Church Army college in Blackheath, London, he was assigned as the associ-

ate diocesan evangelist in the Diocese of Chelmsford until 1992, when he was given a promotion as the bishop's advisor in evangelism.

During those years he worked part-time on a Masters degree in applied theology at the University of Kent at Canterbury.

At the same time, he was told his bishop wanted him to take a job in the diocese that required ordination. "I can't, I'm not ordained" was his answer.

"Now you know what the bishop is saying to you," was the reply.

"That's not going to happen," was David's response. That argument went on for a couple of years.

Finally, a friend convinced him to take it seriously. He wasn't convinced, put up roadblocks and made excuses, until the last one was worked through. He was ordained a deacon Sept. 24, 1995.

"I'd come to terms with it by then," he said, adding he retained his Church Army commission.

He was assigned to the Parish of High Ongar with Norton Mandeville as the priest-in-charge.

VACATION

"In 1992, almost on a whim, Janet and I came to North America for vacation," said David. "We got the last two seats on the aircraft."

They flew to Boston, unprepared for the vastness of the North American continent. Undeterred, they rented a car and got an AAA route plan to visit Niagara Falls, almost 500 miles away.

"I stood at Niagara Falls and said to Janet, 'I've got a funny feeling about this. God is trying to talk but I don't

know what he's saying."

In retrospect, God was saying, 'you'll be back.'

It was in 1997 that an ad in Church Army's British magazine would bring David back.

CANADA

The ad listed the perfect description of David Edwards: lay or ordained, experience in education, at least a Master's degree in theology, experience in Church Army.

"I was one of a few people in the world who had that," said David.

In yet another God moment, the ad was never supposed to have been published in the British magazine. It was for a post in Canada: principal of Church Army college. On his own, the British chief secretary had slipped the ad in his paper.

David and Janet flew to Toronto in the fall of 1997 to attend the national conference of Church Army. David had the interview and got the job. They went home and prepared for a temporary move to Canada in the spring.

Before accepting the job, David visited Church House in London and sought advice on leaving the UK and the Church of England. How long was too long? When should they return?

He was told that three to five years is considered good experience. Beyond that, you're out of the loop.

"So I came for three years," he said.

Janet was prepared for that. Even his parents were prepared to let their only child go for three years. But a great deal took place in those three years.

The college was moving to Saint John, and the first job was to facilitate that. There was a lot of work to do — from scratch, really.

"If Janet hadn't been there, nothing would have happened!" said David, giving his late wife a great deal of credit for the success that saw the college open in September 1998 with four students.

"Ultimately, by 2001, we had about 20 students," he said.

By then they had a faculty of four: George Eves, Reed Fleming, Janet and himself, plus adjuncts like former parish development officer Dr. Ken Neilson. Current PDO Shawn Branch was a student there in 2001.

But his three years was up. Stay or go home?

During those three years, David had immersed himself in the deanery. He had been providing Holy Communion at St. James on Broad Street. Then in 2000, Bishop Bill Hockin asked him to help look after Stone Church in uptown Saint John during a vacancy.

By 2001, his time limit, "I had a sense of a call to Stone. I even talked to Bill about it. But I really didn't think I should leave Church Army at that point."

Bishop Bill offered him the post. They worked out the division of time between the college and the church. Then in 2005, he left the college and became the full-time rector at Stone.

"I couldn't have wished for a better parish," he said. "They are Godly people. But by 2011, somehow I knew I was leaving. I sensed that the Stone journey was coming to an end."

He took the job of parish develop-

My Journey Here continued on page 10

SHROVE TUESDAY

Pancake supper delivery a success in Woodstock



MISSION IN MOTION: community

While COVID-19 prevented us from hosting our annual Shrove Tuesday pancake supper, it was decided that, as part of the ministry of the Pastoral Care Team, we should do something to reach out to those who have been shut in.

It was only possible because of the dedicated team of cooks and drivers who provided a pancake supper to shut-ins from our congregation. Shrove Tuesday was a stormy day, so the pancake preparation and deliveries were postponed until Wednesday and were then delivered to grateful recipients.

A huge thank you to our dedicated volunteers:

In the kitchen — Ann & Jon Tait, Jean Collicott, and Nancy English.

Delivery drivers — Pat & Blair Whitehouse, Andrew Brown, Barb Belyea, Don Niles, Lynne Slipp, Marilyn Sherman, Richard Dennique and Jon Tait.

Psalm 100:2 “Serve the Lord with gladness!”
In the photo: Ann Tait, Jean Collicott, and Nancy English. Photo by Jon Tait.

My Journey Here — David Edwards

My Journey Here continued from page 9

ment officer until 2014, when he was elected bishop.

BISHOP DAVID

“Nobody ever wants to be bishop,” he said. “I was willing to do whatever God called me to do, but I recognized this would be a very difficult task.”

In preparation for a decision, he went through 10 weeks of discernment, including a spiritual director and a retreat, to come to the point of letting his name stand. On the day of the election, “I was surprised, but at peace.”

In 2020, he was asked to serve as an archbishop of the Anglican Church, but what would life have been like had he never come to Canada?

“If I’d stayed where I was, I’m pretty sure I’d have been a parish priest for the last 30 years and that would have been fine. I’ve always enjoyed parish ministry.”

JANET

Janet always hoped to return to the UK. Even so, she was happy to come to Canada because the plan was not permanent.

“But she was always open to the leading of God and she had a sense that God was leading us,” said David. “Was she always happy with it? No, but

she accepted it.”

Janet fell ill in late October, 2018. She was taken to the hospital that night by ambulance, and within four hours, tests revealed what doctors believed was inoperable cancer.

It was sudden and shocking, and the news was devastating. She died two weeks later.

“I’ve always said the way Janet died was how a Christian should die,” said David. “It made a profound impact on me. I’m not sure I could have been so matter-of-fact about it.”

“She cried at times, but she was never angry. She accepted that this was the next stage for her.

“I was never angry either, but very sad, and I continue to be sad. You don’t spend 40 years of your life with someone and not miss them.

“We were able to talk about our lives together and resolve anything that was unsaid.”

COVID & THE PRESENT DAY

David and Debbie (Collicott) were married only a couple of months before COVID-19 put a stop to so much of normal life. Usually David would have been on the road most days of the week and every Sunday. Instead, he’s been home for much of the pandemic.

“The blessing of COVID-19 has been that Debbie and I

have been able to spend time together. We’ve had the opportunity to work on being married. We’ve discovered we are compatible, and we are developing family life.”

This sort of family life is quite new for David. As an only child with no children, becoming a step-dad and step-grandad has been a change, but a welcome one.

“It’s good. We were over at Christy and Josh’s yesterday,” he said. “It’s good to play with the children. Getting to know them. Grace and Isaiah are very sweet children.

“It’s fascinating to watch the kids grow, watch how they work things out. The things they say and do. Yes, I enjoy it.”

Even so, David is feeling the pandemic-imposed distance from his parents and he misses home. As soon as travel is permitted, he will plan on a trip to the UK.

“Dad always operates on the basis of ‘do what you’re going to do’ but he’d like me to be home.”

On the journey that has led him to New Brunswick, he can’t point to any regrets.

“Was it worth it? Of course it was,” he said. “God led us here. We’ve sought to follow the will of God as best we can — Janet and I, Debbie and I — and we still do that.”



MCKNIGHT FILE PHOTO



SUBMITTED PHOTO

ABOVE, THEN BISHOP DAVID during the 2019 Ash Wednesday service at Christ Church Cathedral; **At left, David on Sept. 9, 1986 on his first day at the Wilson Carlile College of Evangelism (Church Army) in Blackheath, London.**