

From the ward to the pulpit

When I was about 7 years old I had a conversation with my parents that ended with them saying something similar to; “So, let us get this right. When you grow up, you want to become a nurse, *and* a priest?”. We had just returned from Church where a missionary, who had been a GP, and his wife, a nurse, had enthralled me as they talked about their work. Although I was very young, I felt that I heard God’s voice calling to me through their words.

Fast forward quite a few years, and I’m at Mile End Nurses home to start my nurse training, in the first cohort of “Project 2000” at The Royal London Hospital. This change to the manner of nurse education and training was to be more academic based than the traditional courses. But we were also being firmly grounded in the practical aspects of nursing by the ward staff. And it is this grounding that has held me throughout my nursing career and remains with me today. Firstly in Emergency Medicine, then Cardiac, and lastly in General Practice, where I am an Advanced Nurse Practitioner in a managed GP practice in North East Wales.

The nursing part of my vocation was being fulfilled. The priest part was not, my Christian faith was still there. But by then I had four young kids as well as being a full time nurse, so attending Church wasn’t always possible and I slowly started to drift away from God. Unfortunately, that marriage deteriorated and eventually we separated and later divorced. After the separation I felt lost on many levels. Then an event occurred that really kick started my journey that led to me being ordained.

I had an accident at work that meant I needed a small operation. While waiting, I wandered into the chapel at the hospital and it was there that God once again entered into my life in quite an unexpected, but very clear manner. There I was, shouting at God inside my head; “Who are you? Who am I? Are you really there?”. Then the chaplains came in for their weekly prayer time. One of them said that he had been going to talk about something else, but that he felt the urge to instead talk from Luke 11; “Lord teach us how to pray”. At that very moment I felt that I had been smacked in the back of the head, followed by an all-encompassing warm feeling of being loved. God was telling me that He was there. With me, He’d never left, He never would leave. I might have wandered, but He was faithful.

The call to priesthood remained and so I started to explore this second vocation in the Church in Wales. The path to ordination has been a long one; sometimes forwards, sometimes seemingly stopped. But when life became discouraging, I remembered that time in the hospital chapel.

Over these years life was rather hectic! Firstly, I studied theology part time with St. Padarn’s Institute in Cardiff; then I completed a part time MSc. to become an ANP; I met and married Olga in 2019; moved house a couple of times; all at the same time as working full time and having my children every weekend. Now my children are older and shared care continues, family life is different to what it was! Still just as busy, but in new ways.

For the past two years I have been attending St Padarn’s again on a part time basis, and been undertaking the practical side of ministry training. Sermons, leading worship, attending services and learning the “how to” part of ordained ministry. It reminded me of my time at the

Royal London during my nurse training. In that one is taught the theory, then taught the reality of actually “doing the job”. Especially as my training incumbent was an ex-nurse herself.



The culmination of all these threads took place at St Asaph Cathedral on 3rd July 2021, when I was blessed to be ordained to the office of Deacon. And next year, God willing, I will be ordained priest. When we are to be ordained, each candidate is able to choose a stole (the coloured scarf that priests wear). Some pick one because they like the design, others will have one that reflects more about their life and their journey to ordination.

I chose to have the badge of the Royal London Hospital on my stole. It represents to me the foundation of my nursing life. The skills that I learnt all those years ago; the philosophy of how to nurse and the core professionalism that was installed in me and has been with me throughout my career; the “London way”. For me, having the Royal London badge on the stole combines the two ways I still feel that I hear God’s call for me; in nursing and in the priesthood.

As I am a self-supporting minister - in effect a volunteer - in addition to my new curate duties, I will continue to work as an ANP to keep paying those bills! And I will be serving my curacy in a group of five rural parishes under the guidance of a senior priest. In entering this new chapter in my life, I will be keeping close in my heart the ethos of "The London", of my nursing, of care and of service to others. And whenever I wear the stole I'll be reminded of this and will say a prayer for you all, for all who are associated with the Royal London, and for the work of the NHS.



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