

A brief Autobiography of Father Steve Matthews

Family Background

- One of seven children (4 brothers and two sisters):
- Born in Queens, NY, and received Baptism, First Communion and First Penance at St Theresa of Avila Church in Richmond Hill, NY
- Received Confirmation at Corpus Christi Church in Mineola, NY
- Father passed away in 1970; Mother passed away in 2011

Academic Background

- St Theresa's and Corpus Christi Elementary Schools – Graduated 1970
- Mineola High School – Graduated 1974
- St John's University – BA Psychology, minor Theology 1978
- Immaculate Conception Seminary – MA Theology 1989
- Completed Studies for Priesthood at Pope St. John XXIII Seminary – May 2016

Business Background

After college graduation, 1978, I worked in the retail industry full time and the banking industry part-time until I entered the seminary (the first time) in the fall of 1979. I remained a seminarian until the spring of 1981 at which time I went back to working in the retail industry. Ironically, In Feb. 1982 I was re-employed in the banking industry at the same financial institution that I worked at as a part-timer prior to seminary.

After about 8 years in the banking industry, I was offered a job in California where I moved to and lived/ worked for 13 years before being laid off. I then worked some independent "gigs" for a couple of years and then was re-hired back to the same company where I was laid off previously. In total, I lived and worked in California for over 20 years.

Faith Journey and Spiritual Desire to be a Priest

I cannot say that "ever since I was a little boy I've dreamed of being a priest." What I will say is that in my late teens/early twenties, a number of people suggested that I consider priesthood. I will add that over the years, others have mentioned the idea as well.

As mentioned above, in December 1970, my father passed away. Soon thereafter, in 1971, I started getting involved at Corpus Christi Church and Rectory. At first it was a couple of hours each week answering phones in the rectory. Then it grew into more involvement over time and at one-point full time hours and many volunteer hours ranging from Parish Council, Lectoring, Liturgy and much more.

Over the years, I questioned the decision of leaving the seminary and not becoming a priest in the 1980s. Many times, over the years I took the time and opportunity to go on silent retreats. While the time in the seminary helped me on my faith journey, it also gave

me a number of fabulous experiences, opportunities, and friendships. To this day, one of my particularly good friends is from the seminary (now a priest) I met while there and we see each other whenever our schedules permit. I returned to the seminary as a layperson in the late 80s and completed my degree studies.

Church/Parish Involvement

In addition to the previously mentioned experiences of parish life in NY, let me briefly mention some of my California involvement. For 21 years I engaged in St. Bartholomew's parish both in liturgy (as sacristan and choir member). I also served on the liturgy committee for three years and then for five years, I was an active member of our social justice ministry, particularly in issues involving affordable housing and global poverty concerns. For two years I served as a weekly volunteer with food delivery for shut-ins through the Second Harvest food program.

Call to Priesthood

All through the years in California every once in a while I would think about priesthood and my response was always – I have been there, done that! Meaning I went in the seminary and that was not for me. Finally, one day I changed my prayer to something like, *OK I am doing you are will for me. But if I am not, would you send a “bolt of lightning” to get my attention?* Soon thereafter I was laid off and well, I was in shock. Not only about being laid off, but about the bolt of lightning. To make a long story short, I yelled at God and said I will get a spiritual director, is that what you want? It was.... And within minutes there was a calmness that I had not experienced before, perhaps ever! Due to a number of factors, it took much longer to find the correct Spiritual Director than I anticipated. However, once I did, the Holy Spirit was working overtime. Each time we met I felt as if I was “light years” ahead of where I was previously.

Finding the Diocese of Albany

Once I decided that I was being called to the Priesthood, it became more and evident that the Holy Spirit was in charge, if I let God's grace and power work. I explored a number of dioceses and was either ignored or told sorry, too old! While I was discouraged, the Holy Spirit (and my Spiritual Director) helped me persevere! To make a long journey short, I inquired with Fr. Jim Walsh, the Vocation Director of the Albany Diocese. (I have a nephew here and a particularly good friend from High School lives in the diocese with her husband, and children.) Fr. Walsh and I chatted over the phone, met in person and ultimately it was agreed that I would move to the diocese to have them get to know me and for me to check out what “upstate New York” living was all about.

Return to (Upstate) New York

Fr. Walsh researched and found a parish in Saratoga Springs that would host me and a pastor who was willing and able to mentor me. I moved to St. Peter's in Saratoga Springs and lived and worked there for about a year. It was a good fit from both the parish and

diocese point of view as well as mine. There was (and is) a very faithful group of parishioners who helped me grow on my journey, not only towards priesthood, but in my faith as well. They taught me about another way of prayer and to this day, they pray for me and I for them, daily.

Return to the Seminary

After the year in upstate NY was over, I applied and was accepted into the seminary (again) and was placed on a path of three years of academia, with the hope of a Diaconate Ordination in May 2015. There were a number of pastoral placements that enhanced my preparation for priesthood ministry that went well with all the “book knowledge” we all were learning. While at times I was uncomfortable in the seminary environment, I knew it was the right path for me. I can’t say that the time flew by, but it was not as “long” as thought it was going to be. The prayer journey there was also a wonderful experience. Several types of liturgies, Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, faith sharing, and praying in silence in the chapel all helped me in my prayer life and on this journey of faith.

Priesthood Ordination

I was ordained to the Priesthood by Bishop Ed on June 18, 2016, along with three other men. Each of us in a way are “second career” priests in that we had a “first” career or work either a few years or a number of years before finally saying “yes” to God. Directly after the ordination, we were each assigned our first parishes as Parochial Vicars (Associate Pastors). I was delighted when I was informed that my assignment was to be with Fr. Jim Walsh (Pastor) at St. Pius X Parish in Loudonville. While I knew little of the parish, I knew Fr. Walsh from the days to my entering the seminary. That first year was all about learning “how to be a priest,” how to pray – both the mass and other ways. How to minister to people who were hurting. (My first funeral was for someone who had committed suicide.) I learned or was reminded to always keep grounded in prayer. The year was filled with lots of firsts and went by fast.

First Pastorate

In July 2017 just a year after my ordination, I was asked by the bishop to become the new pastor of 2 parishes and a shrine in Greene County. While that was easily found on the map, it was not so easy becoming the pastor where the previous pastor and a retired priest offered six (6) weekend masses (3 on Saturday night and 3 on Sunday mornings) along with 9 daily masses. For a number of reasons, the retired priest decided to retire in his home country (Italy) and was no longer able to assist in helping. It was quite the challenge and one of my goals was to form one community where no matter which worship site the person attended; they would feel welcome. After 4 years, the bishop has now asked me to become pastor in Columbia County and I am looking forward to getting to know the people (and the area) there in the days and months ahead. All of the above has led me to my next assignment here in Columbia County.

Second Pastorate

I look forward to leading people closer to Jesus Christ in the Catholic Community of Northern Columbia County. Please be patient with me as it takes a long time to remember someone's name. Maybe now that we do not have to wear masks all the time, it will be easier for me to remember, but I cannot blame that on Covid! I can only blame that on my senior moments! However, I am praying that we all can become closer to God during our time together.

Power of Grace, Prayer and Eucharist

Lastly, I honestly believe in the power of God's grace, the power of prayer – both asking and listening along with the greatest gift we have – the True Presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist!

Invitation

In these coming months, may I invite you to join with me in being open to God's Holy Spirit, the power of God's grace and awesomeness of being Roman Catholic where we are in the presence of Jesus in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Holy Communion and in the Blessed Sacrament!

Litany after Mass

I will be adding a short Litany of Prayer after mass is over to remind us of the power of prayer and of the uniqueness and oneness of Our Catholic Community of Northern Columbia County. Please join me....

Leader:

Sacred Heart of Jesus

Mary, Mother of Jesus

St. Joseph

St. James

St. John the Baptist

All Holy Men and Women...

Our Response:

Have Mercy on Us!

Intercede for Us!

Pray for Us!

Pray for Us!

Pray for Us!

Pray for Us!