

A SURPRISING PATH TO THE PRIESTHOOD

Father Mark Pattock, OFM, CAP

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For some, the call to a religious order comes early in life. For others, the journey to vocation is like cuts on a diamond — it takes many cuts to get the perfect result. The latter was the path of Father Mark Pattock, pastor of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in New Baltimore.

“I think I was always on a journey,” he said.

Pattock grew up in a close-knit family with parents, grandparents and siblings all in the same house. “We were nurtured in our faith from very early on,” he said. “My love for God really began in the home. Like my father, Daniel, I am a self-taught artist, and I play the Appalachian dulcimer that was handmade by my grandfather, John. We helped one another. Every weekend, we worked together in the gardens that my father and mother had planted.”

After his father recovered from a hunting accident, Pattock’s journey took him and his family from his hometown of Natrona, near Pittsburgh, to Coatesville, in the Philadelphia suburbs. Pattock and his father worked for ARCO Chemical. In fact, it was his father who encouraged Pattock, who had worked in a number of different jobs over the years, to apply at the company.

His hiring was a clear sign of God’s providence. He wrote his resume in pencil — for a job at a Fortune 500 company. Even so, he was called for an interview. He sat in the expensively decorated executive suite, the woman conducting the interview holding his handwritten resume in her hand.

“I wasn’t supposed to get the job,” he said. “They had someone else lined up for it. But the woman I was to work with liked me.”

A couple of months into his job taking care of the conference center, Pattock was called to the medical building. His father had become very ill, and the paramedics had to revive him. “He had actually died right in front of me,” Pattock said. “We got on the ambulance together, and he told me he loved me. I called the whole family to the hospital. He died the next day.”

Looking back, Pattock sees God’s

providence. He was able to be with his father in those last moments. He was consoled by his co-workers, who became his support system as he cared for his mother. “It was like God was taking care of me.”

After his father’s death, he worked at ARCO for another decade. He became friends with a co-worker whose husband was a Methodist minister. She told him her husband was reading a book about St. Francis of Assisi, and that even he, a man of faith, had questions about the saint’s ways. This piqued Pattock’s interest, and he began to pray and reflect on his life in the manner of St. Francis.

He learned about the Secular Franciscan Order, founded by St. Francis, who was so popular that lay people wanted to live like him. Both men and women were able to follow Christ through Francis’ example and lead a life of holiness without having to leave their families. He became a member of the Third Order of St. Francis in Philadelphia, which brought him an incredible sense of joy.

“When you feel that joy, that’s a sign that you’re supposed to be there,” he said. “That’s important for people who are discovering a vocation. It’s spirit led.”



“This is what I’m called to do. ... It has been a long, winding journey guided by God — a journey that continues.”

Eventually, he was elected to serve on the council of the Third Order, first as vice minister and then as minister. He began to study Scripture to deepen his knowledge. Through the order’s monthly meetings, he became familiar with the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin with the Province of St. Augustine in Pittsburgh. “I felt comfortable with them because I’m from the Pittsburgh area,” he said.

As he pursued his Scripture studies and got to know the friars, he realized this was where he needed to make a full commitment. He worried about his mom, for whom he had cared for 10 years since his father’s death. But he also knew it was time to do something for himself.

“The Lord was leading me,” Pattock said. “He lured me in a loving, gentle way.”

In his formation, Pattock served men suffering from AIDS in hospice care and was spiritual director for the Third Order of St. Francis in Washington, D.C. He entered seminary in his late 30s. He entered into the Capuchin Franciscan friars in 2000 and was ordained seven years ago. His first parish assignment was St. Joseph’s in Cabot and St. Mary of the Assumption in Herman, not far from where he attended church as a child. He was there for five years before moving to St. John the Baptist Catholic Church and Retreat Center in New Baltimore.

A defining moment in his journey occurred when he was a novitiate. He heard a crash on the highway and hurried outside to help. A young man was trapped in his car. Pattock stayed with him until the police came, and the man died shortly afterwards.

“He was buried on Good Friday,” Pattock said. “His mother and girlfriend came to the scene a week later, asking what his last words were. I took them into the chapel, where they could see the road where the accident

happened. They broke down, and I consoled them, pointing to the crucifix and the road below. It was a powerful moment for all of us.”

Today, as part of the volunteer fire department, he has gone on several calls to assist people who have been in accidents, either physically helping them or providing them spiritual aid.

“This is what I’m called to do. There’s a lot more to my story, with many powerful experiences led by the Holy Spirit,” he said. It has been a long, winding journey guided by God — a journey that continues. †

