

Becoming a deacon, Lau can return the blessings he received

On July 21, four men will be ordained as deacons in the Archdiocese of Edmonton. Grandin Media is profiling each of them. This is Francis Lau's story.

Francis Lau recalls his path towards life as a deacon started with a heartbeat.

It was 1988 and the Lau's son Marcus was born with a heart defect. Francis and his wife Ivy relied on public health care in Hong Kong, because they couldn't afford private care. And they relied on their faith.

"It was very emotional, because you have a newborn baby but the doctor always tells you he's not very well and we had to admit him into emergency a few times," Lau recalled. "We thought 'In Canada he would have a better chance to survive.' The doctors in Hong Kong said he wasn't serious enough for them to operate."

On their third day in Canada, baby Marcus caught a cold – a potentially dangerous development for a 16-month-old baby with a heart condition. The Laus were immediately referred to the University of Alberta Hospital for open-heart surgery.



Francis and Ivy Lau are seen with their son Marcus at his baptism.Courtesy of Francis Lau

The operation was successful, but Marcus had to return to the U of A Hospital each year for re-assessment until he was 20, when he was given the all-clear that he was healthy.

“For us it was a miracle, and we can’t thank God enough. We can’t thank the medical team enough,” Lau said. “It was a very, very challenging journey for both myself and my wife. Every night before we went to sleep we made the Sign of the Cross on his forehead. You don’t know, the next morning, whether he will

wake up.”

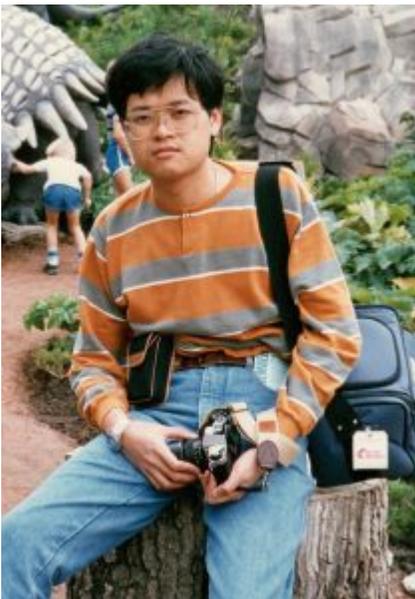
Looking back, Lau said that’s the point where his faith was strengthened. Thirty years later, Lau is among four men ordained to the permanent diaconate for the Archdiocese of Edmonton. Archbishop Richard Smith celebrates the Mass of Ordination July 21 at St Joseph’s Basilica.

Lau it was the health challenges faced by Marcus, and his own challenges as a new immigrant to Canada that influenced his decision to study for four years for the diaconate and return blessings he received.

“I would not be able to go through that without God’s grace, and I believe I should give back,” Lau said.

“Allow me to use a verse from Scripture ‘I’m just a useless servant’. That’s how I see myself.”

Born in Hong Kong, Lau was raised in Macau, where his father ran a small business, until he was 17. Lau’s mother Pui Hing was a devout Catholic and his father Jacob joined the Church when they married. The youngest of five children, Lau attended kindergarten-to-high-school run by Salesian priests.



Francis Lau is seen in this 1986 photo. Courtesy of Francis Lau

Lau graduated from high school, but the competition to enter college was fierce. Instead, he started working in the Hang Seng bank until 1989. Lau’s banking credentials weren’t transferrable in Canada and he worked odd jobs until he returned to banking.

In 2008, Lau attended an international Eucharistic conference where he met a Calgary deacon who was also a physician – the top of his profession – and

humbled himself to serve the Church. Another influence was Deacon Tony Obleada at St. Theresa's parish in Edmonton.

A financial planner and manager, Lau retired in 2016. At the same time, Lau's sons Marcus and Quentin were asking him what he was going to do in retirement. Lau was good at teaching as a trainer when he worked in banking, and he taught Sunday School and sacramental preparation at church.

"I thought about it, and the best thing I could do was to be able to serve the Church," said Lau, 64.

"I thought 'What is the best way to teach, and how does it have a good impact to deliver positive message to parishioners and to people out there who have spiritual needs?'"

Lau is involved with parish council at Mary Help of Christians – the Chinese Catholic parish in Edmonton – where he was guided by pastor Rev. Dominic Qin, and his predecessor Rev. Joseph Tsang. Lau also hosts a regular lunch-and-learn where he teaches parishioners about Scripture.

"Before I walk into the classroom, a few times I said 'What am I going to talk to the kids about?' But then once the class starts: bang, bang, bang, bang. I knew it was not me – it was the Holy Spirit guiding me to talk."



Ivy and Francis Lau are seen with a statue of St. John Bosco on a 2015 trip to Italy. Courtesy of Francis Lau

Lau said it was the Holy Spirit guiding him over four years of diaconate formation. His biggest challenge was language. He was accustomed to reading and studying the Bible in Cantonese.

Lau also now works as a case instructor with the Archdiocese of Edmonton marriage tribunal.

A grandfather of two, Lau's younger son Quentin lives in Edmonton and his son Marcus is in Japan.

In 2012, while working as a nurse at the U of A Hospital, Marcus Lau treated a very special patient: Dr. Neil Duncan. Duncan was the same cardiologist who performed the open-heart surgery on him decades earlier.

Lau now keeps two photos in a frame on his desk, both Duncan with Marcus as a toddler and as an adult.

“It was an amazing story, right? And I told Marcus, ‘It’s God’s will. Dr. Duncan saved you and while you didn’t save him, you actually had the opportunity to serve him.’”