

Call to be a deacon brought Estoque's faith from his head to his heart

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

Pedro Estoque remembers the exact date, May 14, 1994, when his faith life went from routine to real.

Pedro and his wife Rhoda were heavily involved in Holy Family Parish in St. Albert, Estoque as a Eucharistic minister and volunteer. But that date, 25 years ago, is when Estoque had what he describes as a personal encounter with Mary and with Christ.

"You get this vision of God and it seemed like you're meeting Him face-to-face. That changed my life thoroughly," Estoque recalls. "I thirsted for God. I wanted to learn more about Him and get to know Him better. That was my conversion. After that day, there was meaning in what I was doing. The liturgy, the Mass, became real ... I got involved more and searched more."



Pedro Estoque

That search led the Estoques to attend prayer group meetings, even starting one of their own. For Estoque it meant more intentional involvement in church activities, but he wanted more.

"I knew I had a calling to do something for God. I just didn't know where,

what, and when God would be calling me,” said Estoque. The retired engineer and father of three said, “I know that He was trying to call me for the longest time. I never listened at that time. I knew that I wanted to serve my parish. I knew I wanted to serve my community. But it’s different when you’re doing it *for God.*”

Now he’s answered that call to service. Estoque is among four men to be ordained to the permanent diaconate for the Archdiocese of Edmonton on July 21, when Archbishop Richard Smith celebrates their Mass of Ordination at St. Joseph’s Basilica.

“I’ve found and grown in my subjective faith in God. Basically it’s coming from the head and bringing it to our heart,” Estoque said. “It’s that journey that’s the hardest thing to do. That was formation.”

Born and raised in a mining town in the Baguio region of the Philippines, “Bong” Estoque is the youngest of six. Most Filipino families are religious, but the Estoques even more so. His mother Tomasa was a local lay leader and his aunt was a religious sister.



Estoque graduated with a master's degree in engineering management from the University of Alberta in 1996. Courtesy of Pedro Estoque

After graduation from a science high school and the University of the Philippines, Estoque’s older brother Mel invited him to come to Canada. Bong’s immigration application was approved quickly, and he felt “God wanted me here”.

Estoque arrived at Fort McMurray in 1977... to -35°C. It was a “humbling” experience, not only because of the cold, but Estoque initially found it difficult to find work. But he persisted and went on to a long career in engineering, business and government before he retired recently.

Another trial came when Estoque and his wife had difficulty having children. They prayed novenas and their 'miracle baby' Peter was born in 1989. Daughters Rosalyn and Rochelle followed, 18 months apart.

Estoque's first call to the diaconate came around that time. Archbishop Thomas Collins encouraged more ordinations, and friends approached Estoque but he said no. He was too busy. His kids were small.

"I knew that at that time I was already being called, but I guess I was stubborn. I was looking more for me. I thought that I had more places to go in my career," Estoque recalled. Four years ago, that changed.

"It comes to a point where God does humble us. After years of finding me, me, and me, I finally said to myself 'Maybe it's time for me to join this diaconate.'"

As an engineer, Estoque is skilled at crunching numbers. But studying philosophy and theology as part of his diaconate formation was a different story, and so was a transition from a career to a life of service.

"There is the transition of our pride to what really service is," Estoque said. "I had to read the books five times to understand. That was the toughest transition for me in my formation, getting to absorb the books or the teachings. I had to read them over and over just to understand them."



Pedro Estoque is seen with his children Rochelle, Rosalyn and Peter.

Estoque sees the diaconate as the extension of eyes, ears, hands, feet and heart of not only the Archbishop, but of his pastor, Rev. Marc Cramer of St. Charles Parish.

"It's when you touch the poor and serve them that you see the face of what God is all about," Estoque said, recalling his volunteer work at the Marian Centre, Inner-City Pastoral Ministry, and the Edmonton Remand Centre. "Although you can do that as a layperson, but doing it more as an ordained person, it's more like you're doing it for God and with God. And you feel Him to be there."

Estoque said putting God into relationships has strengthened him and his wife and family.

“Especially with daughters, it’s actually listening from the heart and actually listening with an open mind and seeing where they are coming from. I have to admit that my relationship with my daughters changed dramatically when I entered my formation,” Estoque said.

“It’s getting to know God more not from what you read, but knowing Him through the eyes of other people. Looking at the holy presence of God in our neighbour, especially our first neighbour, our spouse, our wife and our children. It’s absorbing that in our daily relationships.”