

“The time was right” – Chris Ashdown always felt called to diaconate

Chris Ashdown remembers when, as a young boy, a nun came to his pregnant mother’s hospital room asking if she could pray for them.

It’s a simple gesture that has stayed with Ashdown for decades.

“I was always wondering what she was praying for, if it led to where I am now,” said Ashdown, one of three men scheduled to be ordained to the permanent diaconate Aug. 11 at St. Joseph’s Basilica in Edmonton.

“I always felt called to be a deacon. I have this increasing involvement in the Church and faith. To me, it was a progression, it was leading to this point.”

Ashdown is a retired healthcare and university administrator. A member of St. Thomas More Parish, he is an experienced adult server and serves as finance chair on parish council. He became a Catholic at 18.

“I was probably seeking God for years, and I met someone who was Catholic,” he recalled. “I started reading about Catholicism, and I said, ‘This is where I need to be.’”



Chris AshdownChris Berthelot, Grandin Media

He had been thinking about becoming a deacon since 2003, when he attended an

information session held by Cardinal Thomas Collins, who was Archbishop of Edmonton at the time.

Since he was still working full-time, Ashdown felt it would be too much work and decided against it. In 2013, however, after his 59th birthday, he joined the diaconate formation program.

"I'm retired, still at the high end of what they say is the cut off age-wise for getting into the program, so I thought it was time," Ashdown said. The age limit to enter the diaconate program is 60.

Ashdown faced a heavy workload during the four-year program. Spread out over 40 weekends, it includes study for a certificate in theology from Newman Theological College. He was accustomed to academic work and has a certificate in liturgical studies from St. Joseph's College. Still, he admits the diaconate program workload was his greatest challenge.

"You sort of go through cycles where there is some doubt. You get frustrated with the amount of work. You get tense with the amount of exams," Ashdown said.

Nevertheless, he appreciated the opportunity to learn more about his faith and to share that with his wife, Jean.

"I knew to be a deacon I had to go through a formation process, but I also look at it as a really good education opportunity for my wife," he said.

Jean Ashdown agrees.

"My prayer practices have grown and increased. I think my faith has really benefited from it."

Now that the formation program is finished, the Ashdowns will have more free time to spend each other, and Chris said he can focus on applying what he's learned.

"All that work is behind me, and I've sort of forgotten about the hardship of things. Now I'm looking at what I've learned and how much of that I can use in my future ministry."

The exact nature of that ministry remains uncertain. And Ashdown likes it that way.

"I don't really know right now where it's going to lead, and that's actually an exciting thing."