

## Friends, family and brother priests celebrate as Robert Lee ordained to a 'noble trade'



Robert Lee with his parents before being called forward during his rite of ordination at St. Joseph's Basilica in Edmonton on June 28, 2018. Alan Schietzsch, Grandin Media

When Robert Lee asked for his dad's blessing to become a priest, the older man's advice was simple.

"I told him it was quite a noble trade, because I'm a tradesman myself, right?" said Richard Lee, a refrigeration mechanic.

"I said, 'As long as it's your choice, and it's not heavily influenced by other people. It's got to be your decision to do what you want to do for the rest of your life.' So then he was good with it."

Robert Lee followed through on that commitment. He was ordained to the priesthood on June 28 at St. Joseph's Basilica in an elaborate ceremony steeped in tradition.

Religious women from several communities added their prayers. Deacons and

seminarians played special roles in the Mass. And bishops and priests came from across the Edmonton Archdiocese and beyond, each one laying his hands on Lee's head during the Rite of Ordination and embracing him warmly during the Kiss of Peace.

As the Mass began, Edmonton Archbishop Richard Smith looked over the crowd of more than 1,000 and – calming any potential nerves – assured Lee that he was surrounded by the love and support of family, friends and the Catholic community.

More than a trade, the priesthood is a calling – and an answer, Archbishop Smith explained.

“Robert, for many years now you have sought to know and respond fully to the Lord's call. As St. Paul puts it, the Lord has set you apart from before your birth, and his call has echoed throughout the myriad events and relationships that have marked your life,” Archbishop Smith said in his homily.

“With you, the Church has discerned, and tonight confirms, that this vocation is to follow the Lord as his priest. The expression you are about to give of your resolution is your definitive ‘yes’ not only to the examination of the Church, but also, and fundamentally, your answer to Christ's own question, ‘Do you love me?’”

Love and support was also evident in the pews. Family and friends travelled from Ontario and British Columbia to join the celebration. Parishioners from Lee's home parish – Holy Trinity in Spruce Grove – came by bus, as did parishioners from St. Thomas More Parish in Edmonton, where he most recently served.



**Newly ordained priest Father Robert Lee offers the Eucharist to his proud parents. Alan Schietzsch, Grandin Media**

Richard Lee, sitting in the front pew with his wife Rosemary and their three other adult children, said they felt a profound sense of gratitude.

The parents have accompanied their son on his journey ever since he first asked for his dad's blessing to enter St. Joseph Seminary.

Richard said his son also shared moments of doubt, at one point even considering leaving the seminary.

"I said, 'Well, you'll always be Catholic, you'll always be religious. There's no way you can get away from the faith, but it's up to you.' Then he actually followed through with it. And the more he got into it, after eight years, he finally said, 'This is for me.' "

Richard was modest about the role he and Rose played in their son's vocation, saying only that "We kept him going to church; our whole family did, so we did kind of spirit it that way. We made him go to church when he was young, and then when he got older, he wanted to go to church, and that was a different story."



**Following his ordination at St. Joseph's Basilica, new priest Father Robert Lee ends the evening with a blessing for his family. Alan Schietzsch, Grandin Media**

Their son's vocation has also come with the added blessing of strengthening their own faith, Richard said.

"What I found all through the years is that he got me reading a lot more in the faith, which I never would have if he didn't do that, so that has helped me quite a bit, and us too, in our vows. We're pretty glad that he chose this as a profession."

Asked if she would ever get used to calling her son 'Father Bob,' Rose said, "Easily – only it will be 'Father Robert!'"

One of Father Robert's priestly duties this summer will be to baptize three tiny cousins in Ontario.

His first posting, effective August 16, will be as an associate pastor at St. Joseph's Basilica, the cathedral parish of the Archdiocese.

Livestreamed video of the Ordination Mass.

*-With files from Lorraine Turchansky*