

## Fr. Eilen's Vocations Story - Spring Magazine Article

Fr. Eilen has been the pastor at St. Patrick for almost five years and a priest for the past eleven years in May 2020. But long before he was known as Fr. Eilen, Allan Paul Eilen was just a boy seeking to do God's will. I recently had the opportunity to speak with Fr. Eilen, now 60, and hear more about his upbringing, education, and the many twists and turns that led to his eventual ordination in 2009.

Allan Paul Eilen grew up in Delano, Minnesota and is one of eight children who kept his mother very busy. Fr. Eilen shared, "There was an excavation company behind us with old equipment and that was a playground for us. My older brother and I would wander over there and drive the road grader after the construction workers went home. The things moms don't find out about under years later."

Fr. Eilen went on to share that he was a good student and participated in sports despite his short stature. "I played sports, but I was pretty small - not that I'm very big now. In gym class my teacher called me 'Big Al Eilen' as a joke. When I was in the Boy Scouts, one of the chaperones dared me to hang upside down by my toes from the pull up bar. Sure enough I could do it," laughed Fr. Eilen. Though Fr. Eilen was not a sports star, he was a high achiever in academics and made the honor roll many times before graduating high school in 1978.

He then went on to attend college at St. Thomas and pursue a biology major (pre med). "I got my biology degree and owed a lot of money after graduation so I worked for an ambulance company as a courier driver." Fr. Eilen went on to spend nearly 20 years in the courier industry, mostly notably with the HealthEast Care System as manager of its Courier Division. During that time, God was slowly speaking to his heart and planting the seeds of his vocation.

"My oldest brother went into the minor seminary one year after college which had a big impact on me. I had also served as an altar server and did all that while growing up, but I still wasn't ready." Then in 1993, he met a girl. "I was attending Daily Mass and praying with my head down. I lifted my head and locked eyes with a beautiful young lady. I knew that first day when I caught sight of her that if marriage was my vocation, she was the one. However I wasn't convinced that marriage was my vocation."

Fr. Eilen, then Allan Eilen, eventually proposed to this same young lady in September of 1997. However, he soon discovered something was missing. Though he didn't know it at the time, God was calling Allan to another vocation. "I hadn't learned to listen yet. I wanted to propose on a Marian Feast Day. Well three of them came and went before I finally settled on September 15, the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. Our Lady was trying to tell me this was going to cause suffering for both of us." The couple finally parted in 1999. "Like anything with love, it doesn't come without the cross. I know she prays for me. I pray for her everyday. I'm happy to be a priest, it's where I'm supposed to be," said Fr. Eilen.

After breaking off his engagement, it took Fr. Eilen another four years of healing before he was ready to pursue his vocation as a priest. He finally entered the seminary in 2003 and was ordained in 2009. Since then, Fr. Eilen has been stationed at Elizabeth Ann Seton, Immaculate Conception of Marysburg, and Nativity of Mary, before coming to St. Patrick in 2015. By all accounts, Fr. Eilen had a long and winding road to his priestly vocation. He offered some advice for those on a similar journey.

"Vocations are out there. With the busyness and noise of today's it's hard for young people to hear God's voice. We have to develop our personal relationship with the Lord. I can't just say I believe in God in my head. We have to invite him into our hearts. That means I have to spend time in prayer which means

nothing more than talking to God. Each vocation is a spiritual marriage where God is asking, 'Do you love me? Will you marry me?' We don't have to figure it out, God already has. It's a matter of us opening ourselves up to receive it. Before he created us, God knew what he created us for and who he wanted us to be. It's a matter of me just drawing close to Him and realizing he desires my best. It's where you'll find your peace and joy."

We can each do our part to support vocations at St. Patrick by attending the Holy Smoke Fundraiser for Vocations on April 25 and 26. All proceeds will benefit our St. Patrick vocations.