

My twin sister, Deborah, and I were born on 8 January 1956 to Myrtress and Lenn Jewell Sparks in St. Louis, Missouri. Both of my parents were raised in the Baptist Church and converted to Roman Catholicism because of prior marriages. My mom's 1st husband died during the Battle of the Bulge in 1944. My dad and his 1st wife were divorced in 1953. My sister and I attended the Baptist Church early in our life. In 1960, my dad was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. The first three years of his illness were spent at the State Hospital. During that time, my sister and I were baptized in the Roman Church on 4 June 1961 and began attending Parochial School. From my earliest memories, I had a sense of God's presence and God's call. My dad was eventually moved to a nursing home where he died in 1970. His long illness and death profoundly affected me. Our growing up years in the inner city of St. Louis in the 1960's were lean but I was sustained by the example of Christians who cared for us, and for my dad, as they lived out their faith.

I was drawn to the sense of mystery, wonder and awe in worship from early on. I also began to sense a call to ordained ministry in elementary school. I was especially drawn to the life and witness of St. Vincent de Paul, whose primary commitment was to evangelize of the rural poor in France and to the formation and education of clergy. He was responsible for founding several religious communities, the Daughters of Charity and The Congregation of the Mission. I followed this sense of call to St. Vincent's College, a Preparatory High School Seminary, in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. In that disciplined yet affirming environment, I continued to grow. My classmates, the faculty and staff encouraged the liberal arts, academic excellence, adventure, risk taking, independent thinking, public speaking and debate. I graduated in 1974 and moved to the Novitiate for the Vincentians at St. Mary's Seminary in Santa Barbara, California. After a year in Santa Barbara, I began college at St. Mary's Seminary College in Perryville, Missouri in August of 1975. My spiritual development in earlier years had been focused around a sense of God's transcendence. In college, in the 1970's, I came to an awareness of God's immanence, especially manifest in worship focused more on one's relationship to community and finding one's place within a community. At the same time, I began claiming my own authority which eventually led me to leave the seminary and pursue other interests. I took courses to become a Paramedic, working as the weekend supervisor for two Hospital-based programs covering 150 square miles.

I still sensed a deepening call to ordained ministry and returned to the Vincentians. I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy. In the fall of 1980, I began Seminary in Chicago which was part of the Association of Chicago Theological Schools. This began my awakening, ecumenically and in so many other ways. I came to value the stories of my sisters and brothers in their particular expression of the Christian Faith. Through my formation experience with those from other seminaries, I became convinced that women were called to ordained ministry, that the Eucharist should be shared by all the baptized and that, my sense of authority, which is collegial and shared by lay and ordained persons, was eventually going to collide with the Roman Church's understanding of authority. I also came to believe that celibacy was a gift given to some persons called to ministry but not to everyone and that human sexuality was much more complex in the lived experience than many of us want to admit. However, I did not have the ego strength to seek to become part of another denomination, although I consider the Episcopal Church at that time.

I was ordained a deacon on 9 April 1983 and served at St. Vincent's Church in downtown St. Louis. I graduated with a Master of Divinity, was ordained a priest on 2 June 1984 and began serving at St. Vincent de Paul Church in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. Serving as a parish priest was an enormous blessing...yet I continued to grow in the awareness that my understanding of faith community was expanding beyond the Roman Church. I looked for opportunities to partner with other denominations in various projects, especially with the Episcopal Church.

I met Dana Wirth while serving together on developing a Big Brother / Big Sister Organization and other outreach projects in Southeast Missouri. Our professional relationship grew eventually into a friendship which changed both of our lives. I was transferred to the Four Corners area of Colorado to serve five congregations in two counties in 1986. Through a year-long process of discernment, which included conversations with my Spiritual Director; Bishop Fry of Colorado and Bishop Jones of Missouri, I came to realize that the spirit and vision of the Second Vatican Council, which had formed me, was no longer evident and I left the Roman Church. The decision to leave involved great consequences and profound pain for many people that Dana and I love and respect and we were committed to remaining in relationship with them even in the midst of the pain. I worked as a Fund Development Specialist and in the fall began a residency year at Seabury Western Theological Seminary in Anglican Studies. It was a wonderful year for both of us. In December of 1988, we were married and in June of 1989, I was received as a priest in the Episcopal Church and began serving as an Associate at St. Gregory's in Deerfield, Illinois.

In August of 1990, I began serving as the Rector of St. Luke's in Whitewater, Wisconsin. Faced with the possibility of closing, the congregation decided to take a risk and invited me to take a risk with them. During those five years, the congregation grew in wonderful ways. Our family grew as well. Christina was born in May of 1991 and Graham was born in June of 1994. I earned a Doctor of Ministry in Anglican Studies from Seabury-Western in 1993. In January of 1995, I began a new ministry as Rector of St. Matthias in Waukesha, Wisconsin. During those eight years of ministry, I was stretched and formed in ways I could have never imagined. Gavin was born in Waukesha in 1997. The congregation grew from a baptized membership of 400 to over 700 and an average Sunday attendance of 125 to well over 250. This was a forming ground for me as an Administrator and Leader, working with a multiple staff and many volunteers and managing the transition of becoming one congregation worshipping at two locations. While serving at St. Matthias, I completed a course of study at the Seabury Institute in Advanced Congregational Studies. During my 12 years in the Diocese of Milwaukee, I served on the Camp Webb Board, as Chair of the Liturgy & Music Commission, on the Catechumenal Commission, on the Commission on Ministry, as Regional Dean, on Diocesan Council, on the Department of Congregational Development (as its chair for 4 years) and as Deputy to General Convention 2000.

In August of 2002, I was called to serve as the Dean of Wellington Cathedral in the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. We arrived in January and in March the invasion of Iraq took place. As you can imagine, we were not prepared to face the fall out which we, especially our children, lived with on a regular basis. After 18 months, we returned to the United States where I was called to serve as Special Priest in Charge at St. Luke's in Rochester, Minnesota beginning in July of 2004.

Life and ministry at St. Luke's and in Rochester have been a singular blessing for our family. The people of St. Luke's have loved us back into a more hopeful and balanced life. Bishop Jelinek offered our family a place to safely land and offered the congregation an invitation to trust him and in January of 2006, after 18 months of ministry discernment, I was installed as the 4th Rector of St. Luke's.

We love the upper Midwest and have found our home in Minnesota. Dana's family roots are actually in Minneapolis/St. Paul, as her great-grandfather, Theodore J. Wirth, worked in the early days for the Minneapolis Park System and she still has cousins in St. Paul. Currently, Dana uses her television news background in her position with the Public Affairs Department at Mayo Clinic. Our daughter, Christina, (18) is a performer and artist with hopes of soon attending the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. Graham (15) is our trumpet playing, soccer loving sophomore at Mayo High School and Gavin (12) is our adventurous 7th Grader at Willow Creek Middle School, who loves the outdoors.

Since coming to the diocese, I have served as Dean of Region V and Clergy Representative to Diocesan Council since 2006. In addition to my ministry on the council, I served as a Deputy to General Convention 2009 which was a wonderful, humbling and challenging opportunity.