



I was ordained to the Diaconate on the Feast of St John of the Cross – 14 December 2002 at St Thomas the Apostle Parish, Kambah, ACT. They are a community of love who first welcomed my family when we emigrated from Malaysia to Australia in end of 1988. It was this community that helped formed me and my family as we journey towards my Diaconal vocation. My first six years, I served as deacon to my parish and the last two and half years as an Army Chaplain with the Military Ordinariate. I am married to Anne and we have three children – Avril and Audrina and David -

all in their twenties.

Life as a chaplain in RMC is demanding, physically, mentally and spiritually. Fitness is important and especially at 58 if I want to keep pace with the young Cadets. Regular PT, balanced diet and sleep is a discipline I can't afford not to keep!

As the base Catholic chaplain, I assist in the running of the ANZAC Memorial Chapel and with morning and evening Mass. Weddings and Baptisms can be happening sometimes on every weekend.

A routine day would start with morning PT. Winter months would always be the greatest challenge running in sometimes minus temperatures!

A quick check of emails and SITREPs (Situation Reports) followed by pastoral visit to the local hospital on base. Attend meetings on day-to-day issues and 'loitering with intent' amongst the student body. Provide the occasional pastoral counselling and delivery of lessons on Ethics and Character Development to the Cadet body.

Then there's the field training exercises – 'Battle Blocks' – at the various Military Training Areas located around the country. As Chaplain, I go out field to support the Staff Cadets in their training as Officers in the Australian Army. Communion service is always well attended when we're out in the bush. At times, together with a driver, we would spend the whole day going from section to section over bush terrain to bring 'Holy communion to the troops'.

I do live 'rough' at times, especially out in the bush, under a 'hutchie' and swag. Meals from the 'Ratpack' (ration pack) is no gourmet experience but very substantial for a full day.

Although the chaplain's role is commonly referred to as 'loitering with intent', but I call it 'ministry of presence' because that's what chaplain's are. "Time out with the Padre" is always a very sacred time for me and the cadets, whether it's one-on-one or in a group. For most of the cadets, it's a time when they can talk about anything else besides military stuffs. It is a time when they can put their guard down and just 'be'.

We bring Christ's presence where ever we go, into whatever situations we find ourselves in. For me, this is a fitting description of the Diaconal Office, not only in parish but especially so in the 'market place'. Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Canberra and Goulburn described his Deacons as 'storm troopers'! How apt I thought because as Deacons, we do 'stir up the dust' in the market place and in people's lives. And after the dust has settled, we move on to another place where Christ leads us.

A most often asked question of me is will I be deployed. Chances are not likely because a priest is still the best equipped – faculty wise – to celebrate Mass and provide the Sacrament of Reconciliation. At present, the ADF is hard pressed for

Catholic priests to serve as chaplains just as the wider dioceses are facing the same situation.

The prayer campaign since seven years ago started by the Knights of the Southern Cross is beginning to bear fruits. We now have a number of candidates for priesthood and diaconate as well as Pastoral Associates (Lay ministers) trained for chaplaincy work. Indeed a bold and exciting move by Bishop Max Davis of the Military Ordinariate.

Chaplains are to minister across denominations and faiths and to the un-churched. I draw inspiration and direction from Mother Teresa : Help the person to be a better person. It's Jesus' way of meeting the person as they are.

In RMC, I am constantly inspired to see Cadets grow and mature in person, character and faith. It is also continuously full of surprises. It has led me to do things I never dreamt possible, especially at my stage in life! I have crawled in and out of caves and canyons and stomped around in marshlands with my back pack, donating my blood to mosquitoes and leeches!

My last outing, I found myself dangling from a 9ml piece of rope about a hundred meters from the ground off Dog Face Cliff in the Blue Mountains! "What on earth in heaven's name am I doing!" I said to myself before clamouring over the cliff! After abseiling about 15 mins (which felt like eternity) I finally reached terra firma. As I took time to let the adrenalin drain, I reflected on the experience.

My life held by a 9ml piece of rope, I realised how vulnerable and fragile life can be and yet, how important it is to trust God that all will be well. It also taught me how important it is to trust others especially the instructors and the team who rigged up the abseiling system!

I have just placed my life in the hands of these people and they respected and valued that trust. As Deacons, people entrust their faith into our hands and I can't help but treasure and value that trust with the utmost care. We hold the person's soul in our hands and that's an awesome responsibility! And God entrust us with that responsibility!

'A man can have no greater love than to lay his life down for his friends.' John 15:13. I often reflect on this. As ministers of the Word, we often preach this from the pulpit. Our soldiers consciously live it daily! Do hold our brave men and women and their families in the Australian Defence Force in your prayers!

May the very best of God's blessings be with you and your family.

*Deacon John Lim  
Army Chaplain.*