

Twin, teacher and Trojan: Meet LA's newest auxiliary bishop

Pablo Kay April 5, 2018



Bishop-elect Marc V. Trudeau. (Pablo Kay/Angelus News)

He is a twin, a former dentist and he is proud to say he put himself through school working long hours as a stock clerk and box boy for a local Vons grocery store. He is also a proud Trojan, with two degrees from the University of Southern California. And he is a cancer survivor.

Msgr. Marc Trudeau may not come with the average bishop's résumé, but that may be precisely why Pope Francis has chosen him to be the newest auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles. He joins five other active auxiliary bishops in assisting Archbishop José H. Gomez with the spiritual care of the nation's largest archdiocese.

Since his ordination in 1991, Bishop-elect Trudeau served in several parishes in the archdiocese, worked as a cardinal's secretary and has been responsible for the formation of LA's future priests as rector of St. John's Seminary since 2014.

Angelus News' Pablo Kay sat down with the bishop-elect for an exclusive interview at St. John's, the place where his own vocation to the priesthood was first confirmed more than 30 years ago. The following is an edited transcript of their conversation.

Tell us a little bit about your life before the priesthood.

Bishop-elect Marc Trudeau: I was born in 1957 in Hollywood. I have two brothers and two sisters. I have a fraternal twin, Michael. We argue over who's better looking, but he's definitely the nicer one.

My parents live in Santa Clarita and will have been married 64 years this June. I went to St. Finbar in Burbank for elementary school and graduated from John Burroughs High School.

I started college at Cal State Northridge as a biology major. I decided early on I wanted to study dentistry, so I transferred to USC for the last year and a half of undergraduate studies, and then went to dental school.

I worked at Vons [on Alameda Ave. in Burbank] all the way through high school, college and dental school. So I actually retired from Vons after 13 years (laughs). I worked a lot of late shifts and weekends. I did everything. I was a box boy, a stock clerk, a checker, I used to clean out the meat department at night ... I think I worked in every department except for produce.

It was in the last part of dental school that I felt that something else was calling me. I had always been involved in my church at St. Finbar, as we had a very active young adult group. The priesthood came to my mind. That's when I went and talked to my associate pastor.

He brought me up here to St. John's [Seminary in Camarillo] and I spent a couple of days sitting in on classes. I knew the minute I was up here that this was what God was calling me to. So I entered [the seminary] in 1986 and I enjoyed my time in the seminary. I know a lot of people who all they think about is getting out, but I enjoyed my time here — never thinking that I'd be back!

What for you is the best part of being a priest?

Bishop-elect Trudeau: I would say Sunday Mass is really when we're "on": preaching, baptisms, all the stuff that comes to you on Sundays. At a number of my parishes, that's when we did religious education, RCIA, so Sunday is the day for parish priests.

My brothers and sisters tell me that I only work one day a week. Of course, it's not true: there's a lot that goes into preparing for it, but it is a lot of work on Sunday! We tell the guys here at the seminary that you can't just rest on Sundays, it's a day of evangelizing, preaching, visiting, being present to the people. That's the day that they're able to come, so you have to be present to them.

Who's been the biggest influence on you as a priest?

Bishop-elect Trudeau: My first pastor at St. James the Less in La Crescenta, Msgr. Tom Doyle, was a big influence on my life.

I would also say Cardinal Mahony. He ordained me, and he was my boss for a long time, and directly so when I was his secretary. I saw how the archdiocese runs working with him.

And I would say, more profoundly, the people with whom I ministered and worked through all these 27 years as a priest. Those are the ones who have influenced me more than anybody else.

What about just as a person?

Bishop-elect Trudeau: My family. They're very close, and having a twin brother is also kind of unusual. There are a number of priests with twins: the cardinal has a twin brother, as does [my former pastor] Msgr. Gary Bauler. So obviously, your brothers and sisters have a lot of influence on who you are and how you grow up. We share a lot and we're very close.

How did you find out about your appointment as bishop?

Bishop-elect Trudeau: I was at a meeting in the morning and afterward, I got in my car to drive to my parents' house. While I was driving I got a phone call from Archbishop Gomez.

I always forget which one of those little buttons you press to answer the phone on your steering wheel while you're driving. So I accidentally cut him off, and it went to voicemail. But it showed Archbishop Gomez's name on the screen, as well as two calls from a 202 [Washington, D.C.] area code.

And I thought: I just got two phone calls from the same number, and I'm pretty sure that's Washington, and I got these calls in short succession before the archbishop's call. So I was thinking: "Uh, what's going on?"

I got to my parents' house, parked, took out my phone and listened to the voicemails. The first was from the nuncio [the pope's representative in the U.S] asking me to call him at that number. And I'm thinking, "He has no reason to call me."

The next voicemail was from Archbishop Gomez. When I called him back, he asked: "So, have you gotten another call?" And I said, "Yeah, from the

nuncio, but I called you first, because I can't think of anything good that would come from the nuncio." He said, "Well, you need to call him first!"

I called the nuncio, and it was not what I expected. He said, "I was just calling to let you know that the Holy Father has appointed you auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles. And of course you say 'yes.'"

He told me the archbishop would be setting the dates for the announcement and ordination. So I'm kind of in shock, and I'm thinking, "I don't even know what just happened." So then I call the archbishop, and by that time he's laughing.

What's going to be the biggest adjustment for you in this new ministry?

Bishop-elect Trudeau: Every change is really hard. I don't like moving or changing, and that's been pretty much what you expect when you're a parish priest is that you move. The hardest part will be the steep learning curve of not really knowing what the auxiliary bishops do.

It was just like coming here [to the seminary]. There's a learning curve that you have to figure out very quickly, because the place is already running, and you're just jumping into it.

It's like going into a new parish. The first year is pretty much finding out who the players are in the parish, who are the people you can go to, you can trust, who's going to help you and who's not going to help you. I think that's the hardest part.

What's the one experience in life that has changed you the most?

Bishop-elect Trudeau: Ten years ago I had lymphoma, a form of cancer. You come out of that with a different view of life. The little things are not so important anymore. I appreciate the things that are important, and I don't sweat the small stuff anymore.

I used to tell my associates, “If it’s not a matter of salvation, then we can wait on this. Or this doesn’t have to be handled, or don’t get too upset about this not going your way.”

You look at little things that go on in parishes that can drive people crazy. Little quirks of individuals or pastors. How many of them really affect us? They’re not all that big.

How did you discover you had cancer?

Bishop-elect Trudeau: I was experiencing pain in my abdomen. It was 2008. I went to my doctor, and just feeling it, he told me he thought it was lymphoma. I went to an oncologist, and within a week I was starting chemotherapy.

Lymphoma is a disease of the blood, it’s all through your body. So instead of surgery, they do chemotherapy and radiation therapy. I went through about six months of being really, really sick. I was hospitalized a couple of times from being sick, having a low white blood count and things like that.

But my doctor was always optimistic, he always knew that we were going to beat it. So, you have to believe him, he knows what he’s talking about!

It was pretty bad, but after the chemo I had a month of radiation. I had two years of follow-up “maintenance chemotherapy.” That was three years of treatment, but I’m fine now.

We hear a lot about “evangelization” in the Church, and you mentioned it as part of what happens on Sundays. What does that word mean to you, based on your experience?

Bishop-elect Trudeau: Recognition of God’s presence in our lives and in the world — the God who created us, and our response back to him. Our experience of God and the response back is in a sense a dialogue:

God's revelation to us requires a response and so that two-way communication is what I mean by evangelization.

We also talk in formation, particularly, about missionary discipleship: that we're always learning and we're always being sent out. This sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning from him, through prayer, study of Scripture and our sacramental practice, and then sharing that with others — and that's what happens on Sundays, that constant sacramental sharing and being sent out as witnesses. It's a dynamic of evangelization.

In your eyes, what is the mission of the Church in today's world, a world faced with violence, secularism and so much suffering?

Bishop-elect Trudeau: Pope Francis calls Jesus the face of God's mercy, and I think the Church is the face of Jesus in the world today. It's being a reminder of God's love and mercy, and also a reminder of the dignity that each of us shares with God by virtue of being children of God — that we're lifted up out of this secularism.

Secularism doesn't promise us anything. It kind of drags everybody down into saying we're equal to animals, whereas the promise of Jesus and the Incarnation tells us that God so loves us that he lifts us up out of that, and has been doing that since He first created us.

So Jesus is the face of that mercy, and the Church is the face of Jesus, so it's all connected. It's all based on the mercy and love of God.

What, to you, is the most exciting thing about the Church in 2018?

Bishop-elect Trudeau: A lot of people right now are worried about church closures, decreased Mass attendance, but I see it as a real opportunity for us in evangelization, to strengthen our faith and to learn more about our faith. Especially for the Church here in LA, which is so vibrant; I think we can make it even more vibrant.

I think there are some populations that really need reaching out to in a more concerted and strategic way: young adults and youths, in particular. Those are the groups that have been disaffected, and a lot of them have been leaving the Church.

I think that those are the groups that I'm most hopeful about, because they bring tremendous gifts, and I can see that from working in the seminary. They have a sense of wanting a life that is more meaningful, and what is more meaningful than a life in Christ? So, as we can give them that gift, the gift of the Church, their lives are going to be better, and they're going to make the world better — this world that can be anti-Gospel and anti-virtue. So I'm looking at that generation.

As a teacher, what's the most important thing you try to instill in your seminarians?

Bishop-elect Trudeau: The most important thing is that we need to meet people where they are. You can't sit back and ask or expect people to come to you. That might have worked 100 years ago, but it doesn't work today. That's where the New Evangelization is so key to who we are as Church today: making inroads into seeking the lost sheep.

What we're working on here in the seminary is, hopefully, helping them to be men of communion — men who are future formers of communion in parish communities.

You're a Trojan. Are there going to be any problems with the Bruins in this diocese?

Bishop-elect Trudeau: I hope not! There's just a couple days a year that USC doesn't like UCLA, right? It's the football game, but the basketball not so much. The rest of the time, I really like my Bruin brothers and sisters. It's a great school, and when I was in college I actually took a UCLA Extension class in Japanese, of all things. So I can say that I did take a class at UCLA.

My Trojan family probably wouldn't be approving of that ... but it should be OK. It's those Notre Dame people that we have problems with (laughs)!
