Rev. Ken Labbé – Autobiography 2024

I was born into a blue collar, Roman Catholic, French Canadian family in the late 1970s. My father was an industrial electrician in a factory, and my mother a stay-at-home mom. I had an older sister, some very close cousins, and a pack of friends living in very close proximity in our small factory town not far from Niagara Falls. We attended French schools, went to church, participated in scouting, and enjoyed league bowling and baseball. It was as plain and wonderful a childhood as one could want in those days.

But my father wasn’t one to follow the rules, and after a fight with the priest, our family left the church. Dad wasn’t interested anymore, but my mother insisted and took us herself to an Anglican church where we were quite active. When we reached our teens, we wanted to have a youth group, so she brought us to the local RCA church. Being new to it, I was drawn to theology, and fascinated by the Heidelberg Catechism. Through youth activities in the larger classis, I became connected with our denominational summer camp and attended a leadership training course. The following year I came on staff, heard the call to ministry, and met my wife.

My years at Redeemer College matured me significantly in theological and biblical understanding. I interned for a Baptist Church for a year, and worked with my home congregation’s youth group as well. I sensed that youth ministry was not the end goal, and knew I wanted to go to seminary. I struggled to leave my dying father, but followed the call to Calgary to be mentored by my old youth pastor while studying at a graduate school there.

I moved back to Ontario in 2007, buried my father, and began my ministry in Kingsville. We loved that little lakeside church and learned so much from them in nearly 12 years of service. Beyond the regular ministerial duties, I was involved in classical ministries, serving as clerk of a candidate oversight committee for 11 years, and further participated in our General Synod as moderator of the nominating committee for 5 years. Even though the RCA was in the midst of the turmoil that’s led to where it is today, conversations were deep and passionate and caused many of us to really engage our theology and practice. It led me to begin ThM work.

But it wasn’t those divisions that took me out of the church. In the spring of 2016, my wife was diagnosed with three different cancers, and over the next 18 months, had 2 surgeries, 8 months of chemotherapy, and 33 days of radiation. This was the most difficult experience of our life, and when it was over I felt unable to serve others. I resigned my post, moved us closer to family, and began an apprenticeship to become an agricultural electrician.

I know that God brought us to Palmerston, and I understand now that we needed a time of healing and restoration. We found a community at Palmerston CRC that loved us when we needed it most. While I was doing some pulpit supply, and even filled a one-year part time contract for a neighbor church, I really just wanted to be in Palmerston. As my apprenticeship was nearing completion, the pastor here took a call away, and I was invited to consider serving here. I didn’t think twice.