

Seeing is believing for this special Reverend

Before she ever stepped foot in Claremont, Diane Jardine Bruce, 53, had a life-changing experience where she knew it was time to serve God. Driving home from church one day, a sudden and overwhelming weight came over her. "It felt like an elephant standing on my chest," she said.

Not knowing if she was having a heart attack, Reverend Bruce pulled the car over to the side of the road and turned off the engine. Then, images of her life flashed before her eyes. "That's when I really thought I was dying," she said.

She saw her first kiss and the desires to one day have a family. She saw her career counselor at UC Berkeley who once told her that she should be a priest. She had a vision of a woman taking the Eucharist at church just minutes earlier. She then envisioned her own face.

"It was like a bellowing voice in the car saying, 'When are you going to stop running and say yes to me?'" she said.

After 45 minutes, Reverend Bruce drove home to her husband and 2 children. She asked him, "What if I told you I have to be a priest." He replied, "As long as you don't take a chastity vow, I'm fine with that."

Twenty three years later, the Claremont School of Theology graduate became the first woman elected to the post of bishop in the Los Angeles archdiocese of the Episcopal Church.

"I'm humbled and honored," she said. "Women have been priests for over 30 years. Women have been rectors of parishes for a long time. Twenty years ago, we consecrated our first female bishop. This isn't news anymore."

In 1993, she enrolled at the Claremont School of Theology to pursue a Masters in Divinity. The Irvine resident maintained a 3.97 GPA at the School of Theology while working nearly full-time at Wells Fargo and raising 2 young children. "I never turned one paper in late,"

School fire quickly extinguished

A memo sent out by Sycamore Elementary School principal Amy Stanger indicated the school suffered a fire on the roof of the multipurpose room but sustained no damage as the Claremont Fire Department responded quickly to put the fire out around 7 p.m. on December 18th.

According to the memo, the pine needles and leaves on the southwestern corner of the roof were possibly the cause of the fire with the flames stretching out approximately 5 feet in diameter. It was confirmed the reason for the fire was neither gas or electrical-related.



COURIER photo/Tony Krickl

Reverend Diane Jardine Bruce, a graduate of the Claremont School of Theology, will become the first female to serve as bishop for the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles.

she said proudly.

"I love Claremont," she added. "I miss Walters, Wolfe's Market, Barbara Cheatley [Antiques]. I had all my favorite shops. It's a great town."

After graduating, the New Jersey native became an associate rector of the Church of the Messiah in Santa Ana. A couple years later, she was assigned to San Clemente's By-the-sea church where she served nearly 10 years as head pastor.

In May, she received notification on her nomination to become a bishop, a position that only 15 women have earned in the history of the Episcopalian Church. But the euphoria of the news didn't last long.

Shortly after being sent the paperwork for the position, Reverend Bruce was diagnosed with breast cancer. She underwent chemotherapy and radiation treatment. Her last treatment was on December 9.

Today, Rev. Bruce is cancer free and as active as she always was, walking up to 5 miles a day and doing yoga. Her hair has quickly grown back and she is ready to take on her new position.

Becoming the first female bishop in the Los Angeles diocese is a far cry from what she envisioned in her future as a young adult. She studied linguistics in college and became proficient in Spanish and Mandarin.

"I was raised a Roman Catholic and I had always felt a strong calling to serve," she said. "And as a Roman Catholic woman, the only option open to me was as a nun. [But] my faithful first kiss and thoughts of having a family dashed that."

After attending a service at an Episcopal Church in New Mexico where her friend's mother was the priest, the wheels were set in motion. "It was wonderful," she said. "I was hooked. It felt like coming home."

She joined the Episcopal Church at the age of 30 and never looked back.

Reverend Bruce's election was somewhat overshadowed in the national media by the election of Mary Glasspool to the post of bishop in the Los Angeles Archdiocese. Ms. Glasspool is the first openly gay woman to become bishop in the church.

"I know that for some, the election of Mary Glasspool is difficult," she said. "But what I see in Mary Glasspool is a very talented priest and a wonderful human being. And my prayer would be that we get to the point in this world where we don't look at someone's race, gender, sexual orientation and love them for who they are and what's there beneath the skin."

Reverend Bruce has a son Max, 27, and a daughter Jardine, 23. She lives in Irvine where she maintains a home office, makes weekly trips to the diocese office in Echo Park and visits local parishes.

"I am looking forward to connecting with people and being out and about at the various parishes I'm assigned to," she said. "It will be great to spread the Gospel message among the people whom I'll be asked to serve."

—Tony Krickl