



How a boy from
California's East Bay
came to lead the
Catholic Church's
bold venture for
Christian unity

CALLED TO *Serve*

For Steven Joseph Lopes, the call to priesthood was never an abstract idea.

"I wanted to be a priest like Fr. Marvin Steffes," he said of his childhood parish pastor, whose loving care for parishioners would model the life of service that Lopes, as a teenager, hoped to someday live.

Similarly, Bishop Lopes' desire to serve the people of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter was not — is not — a theoretical concept.

As the Vatican official responsible for reviewing every dossier of clergy applying to join the Catholic Church through the Ordinariates, Bishop Lopes had the "overwhelming experience of reading all the stories of priests who have made Herculean efforts to come into the Church," he said.

Poring over those autobiographies — "a holy exercise," as he called it — gave him a felt sense of awe at "how the Holy Spirit was living and working in the lives of the people of the

by Jenny Faber

Ordinariate.”

Though highly learned in the teachings of the Church (thanks to 24 years of Catholic education), Bishop Lopes’ love for the Church is not academic or intellectual. It has been his concrete experiences with God’s human instruments throughout his life — his family, his priest mentors and collaborators, religious men and women, along with countless people in the pews — that planted, formed and inspired his vocation to serve the people of God as a priest.

His fidelity to that vocation now calls him toward a new step on his faith journey: to become the first bishop of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, a diocese for Roman Catholics across the United States and Canada who were nurtured in the Anglican tradition.



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Roots of Faith

Bishop Lopes was born in Fremont, Calif., in the East Bay region of San Francisco, in 1975. The only child of Barbara Jane Lopes and the late Dr. José de Oliveira Lopes, he is the son of two lifelong educators. José was a talented linguist who taught languages and history at the university level. Barbara taught in Catholic schools for 47 years before her retirement; she specialized in middle school education and received a national recognition for excellence from the National Catholic Educational Association in 2003.

“I am my parents’ son in that I am very much at home in a classroom,” laughed Bishop Lopes, who received his K thru 12 education entirely at Catholic schools in the Bay Area: St. Pius School (Redwood City, Calif.); St. Edward School (Newark, Calif.); and Moreau Catholic High School (Hayward, Calif.), where he graduated in 1993.

His mother — a woman of Polish descent — was born and raised in Detroit, where much of her family still resides. Bishop Lopes’ father was Portuguese, hailing from Sao Jorge Island in the Azores. José emigrated to the U.S. in the early 1960s and made a home amongst the vibrant Portuguese community in Northern California. He became an American citizen in 1970.

His parents, as faithful Roman Catholics, ensured simple living and religious expressions were part of their son’s daily living. Bishop Lopes said at home, he learned the fundamental

lesson that the practice of faith “wasn’t just on Sundays.”

Bishop Lopes was 14 years old when his father was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Two years later, José died.

Father Marvin

In the years surrounding his father’s illness and passing, Bishop Lopes discovered a spiritual mentor in his pastor at St. Edward Catholic Church and School.

Fr. Marvin Steffes was a priest of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood (C.P.P.S.) who had been assigned to St. Edward in 1979. As pastor, Fr. Steffes was renowned for his kindness, attentiveness and paternal love for the people of the Newark,

Calif. parish.

When Bishop Lopes was in eighth grade, Fr. Steffes came to his classroom door and asked “to speak with Mr. Lopes.”

Why? The Precious Blood father wanted to invite the then-14-year-old Lopes to be part of a quartet of students who would serve as sacristans at the parish.

Bishop Lopes said yes.

For the next eight years, the future priest and bishop would learn from Fr. Steffes not only how to train altar servers or clean up after Mass, but also an intuitive sense of service to others and a commitment to the greater good. Frequently, the warm-hearted pastor would spark friendly conversations with the young Lopes to subtly “quiz” the teen on the theology he was learning in Catholic school.

“I think my own sense of vocation grew simply by working alongside him and seeing how he would minister to us,” Bishop Lopes said. “Marvin was just a very good man and very at ease around people. He has always been the model of priesthood for me.”

By the time Steven Lopes was in high school, the example of Fr. Steffes

Early Days

Above: Bishop Lopes as an altar boy at St. Edward Catholic Church in Newark, Calif. Clockwise from top right: Fr. Marvin Steffes, C.P.P.S., with a young Bishop Lopes entering seminary in Menlo Park, Calif.; Bishop Lopes cooking American cuisine for fellow seminarians at the Collegium Canisianum in Innsbruck, Austria; With his mother, Barbara Lopes-Dias, after his ordination to the diaconate; With best friend and classmate from the Pontifical North American College, Fr. Jeffrey Loseke.



had irreversibly influenced his path. While a Moreau High School Mariner, Bishop Lopes began to discern the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood. He continued his discernment during his studies at the St. Ignatius Institute at the University of San Francisco (USF), where he majored in theology and minored in philosophy and German.

At USF, he lived on the fourth floor of Gillson Hall, where he roomed with a future Benedictine brother and became classmates with others who would be eventually be called to priesthood, too. Together, they studied and deliberated the Great Books of the Western World and fell deeper in love with the Catholic faith.

With the encouragement of his friends and family, in 1996 Bishop Lopes entered St. Patrick’s Seminary in Menlo Park, Calif. for one year. A standout student, he was sent on to the Pontifical North American College in Rome to continue his seminary education as a candidate for the priesthood for the Archdiocese of San Francisco.

From Parish Ministry to the Vatican

Bishop Lopes’ days as a seminarian and priest have taken him back and forth across the Atlantic.



As a seminarian, he studied philosophy and liturgy at the University of Innsbruck in Germany before earning a baccalaureate in theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in 2000.

On June 23, 2001, he was ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of San Francisco by Cardinal William J. Levada (then

Archbishop Levada).

After his ordination, Bishop Lopes served as an associate pastor at St. Patrick Catholic Church near Union Square in downtown San Francisco. He then returned to Rome to complete his licentiate degree in theology at the Gregorian University.

After finishing that second degree from the Gregorian, Bishop Lopes headed back to California to serve as an associate pastor for two years at St. Anselm Catholic Church in Ross, Calif. He then returned once again to Rome to earn his third degree — a doctorate in sacred theology — from the Gregorian.

While obtaining his doctorate, Lopes was invited by then-Archbishop Levada to serve as his priest secretary in San Francisco. Bishop Lopes was prepared to return home to the Bay Area for this new position — until Archbishop Levada was named Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), the Vatican office responsible for promoting and preserving Catholic teaching.

So Lopes remained in Rome. In 2005, he was appointed an official of the CDF and would serve as secretary to two Prefects of the Congregation: Archbishop Levada, who was elevated to cardinal in 2006, and Gerhard Cardinal Müller, who succeeded Cardinal Levada in 2012.

During his time at the CDF, Bishop Lopes was also actively teaching across the Eternal City: as an adjunct theology professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University; as a homiletics instructor at the Pontifical North American College; and as a faculty member for the summer sabbatical program for the

Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious.

“I’ve not had the usual priesthood,” Bishop Lopes said. He envisioned becoming a parish priest. His years in Rome were not what he expected when he was ordained.

“But I’ve come to see in teaching students and in my ministry at the CDF, there is a tremendous joy to be found as a priest,” he said.

“When it comes to the daily celebration of the Eucharist, we understand the gifts we offer flow from the life we lead — and the gifts we receive from the Eucharist flow back into the life we lead,” Bishop Lopes said. “So knowing that the work I do is always united to the sacrifice of Christ — that sustains me.”

The Road to the Ordinariates

Long before Bishop Lopes arrived at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Holy See had been paving a path for individual Anglican clergy to come into the Church as Catholic priests. In 1980, the Vatican established a Pastoral Provision that provided a way for these clergy to be ordained, and to create “personal parishes” within existing Roman Catholic dioceses for groups of formerly Anglican laity called to the Catholic Church.

But in 2007, groups of former Anglicans began to persistently raise new questions to the Holy See: Would there be a way for us to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church, which we have identified as our true spiritual “home,” not as individuals but as entire communities? Could our parishes join the Catholic Church in such a way that we could preserve elements of our liturgical heritage?

A study was commissioned to uncover the answers to these inquiries. Bishop Lopes, as an official of the CDF, was among the first assigned to the commission.

The group’s work eventually gave birth to the November 2009 apostolic constitution, *Anglicanorum coetibus*, in which Pope Benedict XVI authorized the creation of Personal Ordinariates: structures equivalent to dioceses that are fully Roman Catholic, yet retain elements of Anglican heritage and liturgical practice. By this constitution, the Church affirmed the Second Vatican Council’s vision for Christian unity in which diverse expressions of one faith could be joined together in the Church. (In the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, the Catholic Church specified what it would look like to bring all Christians together into communion. The Council said Christian groups would bring their own distinctive traditions to the Catholic Church; they would not be suppressed or absorbed.)

After *Anglicanorum coetibus* was issued, Bishop Lopes served as the executive coordinator of the Vatican commission, *Anglicanae Traditiones*, which developed *Divine Worship: The Missal*, a historic new book of liturgical texts for the celebration of Mass in the Personal Ordinariates around the globe. The missal combines elements of the Catholic and Anglican liturgical traditions.

Bishop Lopes likes to call the Ordinariate “ecumenism in the front row.”

“It is a model of realized ecumenism, a reminder — uncomfortable perhaps for some — that simple coexistence among Christians is not the unity our Lord prayed for,” he said.

Many of Bishop Lopes’ nearly 11 years at the CDF were spent articulating the theology of how the Ordinariates could contribute to the vitality of the entire Catholic Church. But it was his experience of evaluating the hundreds of applications of clergy applying for entrance to the Ordinariate that gave him the deepest insight into the reality of Christians being



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Set Apart to Serve

William Cardinal Levada (then Archbishop Levada) ordains Lopes a priest for the Archdiocese of San Francisco on June 23, 2001. Inset: Bishop Lopes, second from LEFT, during the Liturgy of the Eucharist at his Mass of Ordination to the priesthood.



Photos courtesy Steven J. Lopes, Catholic San Francisco, Archdiocese of San Francisco and by J. Faber

drawn together into one communion.

“It was my job to read their spiritual autobiographies — to learn of their lives, ministries and faith that led them to the Catholic Church,” Bishop Lopes said.

Reading those stories reawakened in him a sense of wonderment of being part of God’s Church.

“These priests and people are from communities that are vibrant and whose faith has cost them; they’ve had to make major decisions that affect their parishes and families in order to come into the Catholic Church,” he said. “But this makes them tremendous evangelizers! They are able to articulate the joy of being Catholic — and the sense of adventure that being faithful can push us past our comfort zones.”

‘In the hands of God’

On Nov. 24, 2015, Pope Francis named Bishop Lopes, 40, to be the first bishop of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter.

At the Houston press conference to announce the news, Bishop Lopes said he learned of his appointment from the CDF’s Cardinal Müller, who began the conversation with Lopes by calling him and stating simply (in German), “It’s me. Go wait for me in my office.”

After getting past the gulp in his throat once he was told of Pope Francis’ appointment, Bishop Lopes thought of the many people in the Ordinariate he has come to know through his years of ministry at the CDF. “It was in thinking of them, who have become true friends, that I thought, ‘There is no where else and with no one else I would rather be.’”

He admitted “nothing ever prepares you for being a bishop.” But he did note that his 10 years of working alongside Cardinal Levada at the CDF was “a privileged school” in learning to be a responsible servant leader of the Church.

“Cardinal Levada is a tremendously wise person who is a quintessential professional, and whose every action and deed was motivated by love for the Church,” Bishop Lopes said. “I

At Work

Clockwise from top left: Visiting with Fr. David Schunk, friend and Vocation Director for the Archdiocese of San Francisco; Touring ecumenical leaders on a pilgrimage to Rome, including Archbishop George Niederauer of San Francisco and Bishop Tod Brown of Orange, Calif.; Meeting with Fr. Charles Hough IV and liturgist Edmund Murray of Our Lady of Walsingham Catholic Church to plan the Feb. 2 Mass of Ordination; Addressing a full room at the Nov. 24, 2015 press conference to announce his appointment as bishop. Above right: Distributing communion on the First Sunday of Advent, Nov. 29, 2015. Below right: With Cardinal Levada at the North American College in Rome in December 2015.

learned from him the practice of discernment, of recognizing what is necessary to do, so that I may be responsible before God for all the people of the Ordinariate.”

His immediate goal as bishop is to visit as many of the Ordinariate’s 43 parishes and communities across the United States and Canada as he can. “I’ll be spending a lot of time on an airplane,” he said.

When Bishop Lopes visited with Pope Francis the week before Thanksgiving, the Holy Father had just reminded bishops to stay in their dioceses and work, and not to become “airport bishops.” Bishop Lopes said he asked the Holy Father for a little exception to that rule. “I’ll be on the road a lot, going out to the people,” he said. Bishop Lopes is already scheduled to visit 11 parishes in the U.S. and Canada in his first four months as a bishop.



Bishop Lopes has great hope that the Ordinariate’s work and mission will escalate. The Ordinariate just launched its newest community of three dozen members — St. Margaret of Scotland — in Katy, Texas on Dec. 13. Recalling that one of the Ordinariate’s larger parishes began with just a trio of

members and now boasts nearly 800 parishioners, Bishop Lopes said, “It is an amazing thing that God has done.”

“I learned from Cardinal Levada the practice of discernment, of recognizing what is necessary to do, so that I may be responsible before God for all the people of the Ordinariate.”

how we live our lives. When we talk about the development of the Ordinariate, God is the ultimate architect of it. This great work — the work of the communion of the Church — is not ‘ours.’ It is in the hands of God.” ■