

Follows calling to St. John's

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By Dave Canfield
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COHOES — Rev. Geraldine Dobbs Clemmons, the new rector at St. John's Episcopal Church, will admit that church duties aren't exactly her life's first line of work.



Newly ordained Episcopal priest Geraldine Dobbs Clemmons greets her congregation at St. John's Episcopal Church in Cohoes. She will become the 17th rector of the church. (Photo by Jeff Couch/The Record)

how He works.”

“It's not my first career,” she said after she was ordained into the priesthood at the church Sunday. “Or my second or my third career. But I had a calling.”

The Memphis, Tenn., native said that calling began when she was a young girl, but wasn't fully realized until much later — after she had taught high school English in several states, worked as a legal secretary in Washington, D.C. and went back to college for physical therapy and taken a job in that field.

She graduated with a master's in divinity from Trinity School in Pennsylvania last year and came to the Capital District soon after. It's been a long journey, but now “Mother Gerry” is now the first female priest at St. John's, the oldest incorporated church in Cohoes at 178 years old.

She said she's ready to lead the parish and “bring light to the dark places of the world.”

“He has been drawing me to him, and here I am in my 60s and I'm here in the Diocese of Albany and I was ordained a priest,” she said. “That's

She was formally welcomed into the priesthood by Bishop William H. Love before the church in a formal hour-plus ceremony.



Bishop William H. Love of the Episcopal Diocese of Albany anoints the hands of the newly ordained Geraldine Dobbs Clemmons into the priesthood at St. John's Episcopal Church in Cohoes. She will become the 17th rector of the church. (Photo by Jeff Couch/

“The Lord has blessed you with a variety of gifts,” the Bishop told her. “He also blessed you with a wonderful group of folks in this parish.”

Clemmons task is to help those parishioners “remember who we are called to be,” and while he cautioned her to not take on too much at once, he said that her duties will bring her close to the lives of those families that attend the church, which has been housed in its current structure on Vliet Boulevard since 1970.

“As a priest, you will be blessed with sharing in some of the most precious and holy moments anyone can experience,” the Bishop said.

Clemmons, who is married to retired Navy officer Byard Clemmons, said she hopes to reach out to the broader community to draw in those who typically do not attend church, citing its central location — near the border with the town of Colonie — as a strong point.

Though she is only a day into the priesthood, she said she’s been transitioning towards such a life for some time now. As she recalled her

encounters with geriatric physical therapy patients in South Carolina, it became clear that spreading God’s word wasn’t a task she just took up this Sunday.

“People started saying to me, “Are you the therapist or the preacher?”” Clemmons recalled. “I said, ‘I’m both.’”

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