

## HISTORY OF VOCATION – BOUGAINVILLE DIOCESE CANDIDATE: CHARLES PANAU

Despite the calling, whether you are called publicly or called secretly, it does not matter, but the calling is same and the message that will be delivered is just the same. However, the message varies because it's up to each individual person to interpret the message or information. We only know the message when it is acted or expressed.

I will try to express myself by telling a story of my vocation, which is a special call (a gift), not like the one I've mentioned above. This is a call of a person's inner conscience where a very little voice speaks softly in an inner heart. And it is the person who reacts to make it become real when he acts upon hearing the message. This implies that he is now leaving his communities and moving towards where he will discern and nourish this call. For those with a silent heart and mind, it is always clear at the first place, whereas to some it is not clear enough, and that is why it needs proper and conducive environment for digestion of the message delivered in the beginning.

To me (my experience) the voice that spoke in my inner conscience was mixture of voices, maybe the from the secular world and that of another world. Who knows? I could not be able to figure out the differences between the voices of the two worlds. The materialistic conscience was so strong that I could not be able to listen well in order to discern clearly. However, it does not mean that it disappeared in the material world, but somehow it was suppressed right within. However, there came a time when this inner conscience turned out to be very clear, and it was through a real event that I came across. Just after the bloody crisis that was in 1993 when I was 18 years of age, one of the diocesan priests, Fr. Mathew Ive from the diocese of Alotau, came and celebrated mass with us in the community. Upon hearing the message that one of the diocesan priests would be coming, the people prepared the chapel. However, it was very sad to see people in the community preparing mass to be celebrated in a rundown chapel ruined during the crisis, but this did not change the mind of the people. When everything was ready the catechist rang the bell, and the entrance hymn was sung.

The new priest processed, and everyone really wanted to see who he was, so their eyes were opened while singing. He reached the altar and began with the mass up until the homily. Because everybody was in despair during the crisis they really wanted to hear something (a message) peaceful that would be of great relief. It came to a homily, mind you, the father's homily was based on what we had experienced during the crisis; he was speaking as if he was one of us carrying heavy loads into the bush night and day, starving and looking for a safe place. However, the congregation was quiet because it was like a slap on the face. He mentioned that it was a wound that was curved in our hearts and would take years and years to be healed up. The part that struck me was this: it needed somebody to break this barrier in order to free the community and bring them back where they were before the crisis. After the mass we all had a bung kaikai with Fr. Mathew. We chewed betel nuts, but I was not really concentrating much because I was thinking of the homily that was given. The thought was there and when things returned to normalcy, the people renovated the parish church building, and when maintenance was completed, people began to go to church services, but we had only communion service because there were only few priests that time until the bishop sent one of the local priests. However, it took us couple of years for the priest to take possession of the parish because the situation was not 100% fine. And to make it worst it was very hard for us to get new hosts and wine once we ran out of the wine and the host. The parishioners faced such a difficult situation that it really made me felt sorry for my people. Somehow it awakened the first thought that I had in the beginning of pursuing this vocation.

Having this in mind, in 1999, I applied to one of the boys school, St. Joseph Rigu high school, which was run by Marist Society. It was established just after the crisis purposely to give a chance to those students whose education was disrupted by the bloody crisis. At the same time they are conducting trauma counseling to the students who were abused and got affected during the crisis. Such work of counseling and teaching really attracted my attention, so I planned to join the Marist Teaching Brothers. Without any hesitation I had a talk with the superior and after all the discussions, I was declared as one of their candidates. It was in 2000, when doing my final year, grade 10, at the beginning of term 4 and that was before the final examination, that I was asked to attend the propaedeutic program as an aspirant

dreaming to become Marist Brother. I spent almost three weeks and returned back to the school for the graduation. We had a graduation before the final exam to avoid students consuming alcohol and creating problems in the school ground. When the actual week for the exam arrived, we just concentrated on the exam till the last day. So after the exam, we all (only final year students) packed our luggage or bags and the school truck drove us home. The only message we received for the last time was to wait for results or offers from the schools that we had applied to. Some of us we had already secured a position and did not worry about anything. However, there comes the times when the decision made was split into two: I received an offer from St. Peter Chanel College, Ulapia Minor Seminary, in East New Britain. That time I did not expect anything from anywhere. My focus was on joining the Marist brothers.

However, I really forgot the form that I had filled from Ulapia given to us by Bishop Bernard (not yet installed Bishop) during his vocation talk, when he had been a vocation director of the diocese. Because my other brothers were filling the forms, I also had to fill one. One funny thing about me is that when I saw people filling forms (any forms) I always had this in mind, (man, em ol man save na ol biksot ya), that those people filling the forms are the only intelligent ones, and also are the big shot people. That is why I had to fill in one form; otherwise, I'd had been one of these foolish people who doesn't have any number at all. So it's like doing things without a proper planning and not even knowing what type of outcome it would be at end of the day. I got up caught up in the two circumstances in which my focus was not stable. This really gave me hard times to make a decision because I loved both vocations, that of becoming a Marist Brother and that of pursuing this vocation (priesthood) so I tend to questioned myself, if I could I become both. The very last thought I had in mind was that I would leave it until the last days of the beginning of the new school year, 2002 (idea of, first come, first serve). Finally the idea of first come first serve somehow worked out with me, Charles Panau, ending up at Chanel College. The answer to the question of how I saved to meet the school fee and also delivered the necessary information that school required of me - about that I don't have any idea. I just arrived at the college and from that time I knew that I was at Ulapia Minor Seminary. So the very first plan of becoming a Marist Brother was just left behind, without having in mind to disregard this vocation. However it's just that the flight to Ulapia paved its way itself that made me end up there. EM TASOL LIKLIK STORI BLONG MI LONG VOCATION, AMEN!