

Steven Kongop (Diocese of Mendi)

My Vocation Story

I grew up in Bela, a remote village in the Mendi/Munhiu District of Southern Highlands Province. I am the last born in a family of five children. My father died while I was five months old. My family depended solely on my mother since the death of our father, and she is the most treasured person in my life. She is my mentor, the one who taught me the daily prayers, took me to the Church and helped built a strong Catholic Faith in me. As a child, I had always followed my mother wherever she went. Many times I went with her to the Church, and I came to know more about God through her. My elder brothers and sisters were also interested especially in the Church's activities and in some ways, they had also influenced me. However at that time, I did not have any idea about entering the seminaries and thus becoming a priest. Many times when the parish priest came to celebrate the Eucharist, I usually admired him and had some kinds of thoughts about him. In other words, I had always envied him.

I came to know more about going to the seminary in 2007 when I was doing my grade eleven (Gr. II). In other words, I came to realize my special call to follow in the footsteps of Christ while doing my eleventh grade. I was a member of the Catholic Students' Association at that time. Every Friday night we normally had our night fellowships, and sometimes we often invited someone from the Diocesan Vocation Office to come and give us vocation talks. Inspired by these talks, I decided to write to the Diocesan Vocation Director expressing my desire and interest to study for the priesthood.

Several times I had written to the Diocesan Vocation Director and also received his replies. I kept in touch with him for two years (2007-2008). I sat for the entry exam to go to the seminary in 2008 prior to sitting for the Gr. 12 National Examinations. I did not take the entry exam seriously because I thought that I would secure a space in one of the tertiary institutions in the country. A few weeks later I sat for the Grade Twelve (Gr. 12) National Examinations. I went home for holiday after the exams and awaited my offer. Unfortunately the next academic year began, and I did not get any offer from the tertiary institutions where I had applied. I felt very depressed and hopeless when I heard that some of my classmates got their offers and went for further studies. I thought that it was the end of my life and thus, and I was no use in the community. I thought of committing suicide or running away from my village because I feared bearing the names 'Failure' and 'Drop-out'. However, in the midst of my distress, God has given me a new hope.

My parish priest came for Mass on a Sunday and announced that I had been accepted to study for the priesthood at St. Fidelis Seminary in Madang. I was very happy upon hearing the good news and forgot everything that had been occupying my mind. I thought that I was lifted up to the heavens on that particular day. My family members, relatives and the Christian community were also elated. They helped me in terms of money and clothes, and some even promised me their prayers when the time came for me to leave for St. Fidelis Seminary. It was the beginning of a new era in my life.

Hence, when I go for my term breaks or holidays, the whole community respects and treats me differently, unlike my classmates who come back from the tertiary institutions. I first experienced it in 2009 when I did go home for my first term break from St. Fidelis Seminary. I did realize that my people treated me differently, like someone who is heading one of the governmental departments in the province. Even one of my drunkard relatives who did not seem to care for me during my past years greeted me with tears flooding his eyes and said; "Son, you have made a right choice." I did not figure out why they treated me that way. It is a question that is still in my mind even today, but the only possible answer that I could think of is, 'Because I am a Seminarian, a sinner called to follow the footsteps of Christ'.

Though I had sometimes wandered away from my sacred calling, the Lord did not abandon me. He always leads me back to his sheepfold. From these experiences, I now realized that God has given me a new hope in the midst of my distress for a purpose. Therefore I will pray and discern God's purpose in my life as I go through in my seminary life.

My Vocation Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I hear the voice of the world. Sometimes it is loud and clear; other times it is soft and sneaky as it tries to lead me away from my sacred calling. Make me strong, O Lord, and with clear vision that I may stand strong against all the false and misleading attractions of this world. Lord, let me hear your voice calling me to share in your priesthood, not the voice of the world calling me away from You. Amen.