

Howard Bopia

We had a parish priest who is German by nationality. He belongs to the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC), and he served in our parish for almost thirty years. Anyway, one Sunday he went to serve mass in our village. That was in year 2000, and that time I was doing my fourth grade at the age of fifteen. That which attracted me most were the liturgical vestments that he wore during the Eucharistic celebration. When the priest went back, I did not think of what I experienced any more. Whenever he came to our village to celebrate mass the attraction became something to think about. But I did not express my feeling to anyone. Until one day I heard my father saying to my mother, "Why don't we send another child to the seminary?"

That year [2000] my elder brother was doing his fourth year in the seminary. At first, I felt discouraged because many were asking, what will you get from the seminary? But I only realized later that their intention was nothing other than money. Anyway, by the time I reached grade 10 in 2006, I came to a firm decision to go to the Minor Seminary to do grades 11 and 12 respectively. I wrote a letter of interest to our vocation director. There was no reply, so I wrote another letter, and finally I got the reply with forms. I filled the forms and mailed them back to him. After sitting for the grade 10 national examinations, I received two acceptance letters; one from Utmei Secondary School and the other from St. Peter Chanel Minor Seminary. I choose to go to Minor Seminary rather than going to Utmei Secondary School.

The year 2008 was a challenging year for me. The principal was issuing the school leaver forms to grade 12's. Many filled the forms and handed them back to him. When they came back they would discuss their choices of tertiary institutions. I was thinking, why shouldn't I fill one out? Then I came to my senses that it is my choice to come to the Minor Seminary, to journey in this vocation to the priesthood. I applied to the Bishop to do my propaedeutic year, so I was accepted. In November, 2009 we ended the propaedeutic programme; and in 2010, I went to Sacred Heart Inter-Diocesan Major Seminary along with other seminarians whom I am still journeying with until now.

The motivation at first was kind of external, meaning to say that the life of a priest especially in the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is an inspiration to come to the seminary. But by journeying deeper in spiritual exercises and in academic exercises, the inspiration as well as internalization of these things helped me to see the priestly vocation as more than just celebrating daily masses with liturgical vestments. The priesthood for me is a commitment to save souls, both living and dead through administering sacraments and praying for the deceased. It has to do with manifesting God's love in faith and good works [as St James explicitly tells us in his Epistle].

The journey to a priestly vocation, to me, is to be an humble act; looking upon Christ, but with his assistance in hope to serve him well in his ministerial priesthood.