

My name is Mathew Gona and I was born on the 3rd of December, 1995. I came from Pomio District in East New Britain Province. In my family we were made up of six siblings, two girls and four boys including myself, and I was the second last born in the family. Both my parents were simple subsistence farmers, and we grew up from a simple Catholic family. In the year 2000 on the 6th of May I went through a serious operation in Nonga General Hospital. Thus, all my other three brothers were operated with the same illness, but fortunately none of us has lost his life. I have so much loved my family my parents, my two big sisters and my three brothers. In the year 2003 to the year 2005, I did my elementary prep one to grade two in Pomio Elementary School in my own village. After completing my elementary education I proceeded on with my primary school studies. In the year 2006 to 2011 I did my grades three to grade eight in Pomio primary school. Although I would not believe that I would make it through my exams, somehow I have made it through, and I was selected to continue on with my education to do my grade nine and grade ten at Palmalmal High School. In the year 2012 to 2013 I did my grade nine and grade ten; however, I saw that my life had changed from the life I had lived before with my parents. I was so much influenced by so many things, but I still had my personal times to pray my rosary. The praying of the rosary was my pet prayer that even anywhere I go my rosary was always in my pocket. I had no knowledge of other prayers, but it was only the rosary that I really knew within my heart.

After completing my grade ten I was selected to continue on with my secondary studies of grade eleven and grade twelve at Palmalmal Secondary School. The days of my secondary school life were now distinct from my high school, primary, elementary, and my life before at home with my parents. I started to get involved in many peer group activities, doing things that I was not supposed to be doing. I felt that I was so much influenced by my friends in drinking homebrew, smoking, stealing food from the mass or in the school garden at night and climbing coconuts at the residential areas of teachers. I was so much happy to further my secondary studies of education; however I really deprived my opportunity or my right of studying by being lured by my own friends and peer group mates. This became a seduction to my faith and made me sometimes not to attend church services. Thus I can say that even also all throughout those years I did not even go for any confessions, but only in Easter and Christmas celebrations.

Although I encountered this in my life, this did not hinder me or make me cease from praying. I had my own personal times to spend with God in prayer. I knew my faith, my Christian prayers, especially praying of rosary, and also I started to know other well-known Christian pidgin prayers. On Sundays when I missed the Eucharistic services I sometimes said my own prayers in my room. The thought of entering the seminary was not really in my mind. I was dreaming of becoming an soldier or a teacher when I was still a child; then during my high school and secondary years this thought still remained in me. I can recall back to my childhood days when my brothers, sisters or even my own parents would ask me about my dream for the future and I usually talk about becoming an soldier or a good teacher. I was dreaming of living a good life, a life filled with happiness and enjoyment. After completing my grade eleven I went back for my Christmas holiday at the end of the year 2014.

Nevertheless the dream I had in me started to fade away from my mind, and I was somehow inspired by the way and the simple life lived by a brother priest and deacon. Thus there were these two brothers who really caught my attention so much; they were Fr. Michael Utkapenga and Brother Cornelius Gaga. The way they both lived their life in the community really inspired and motivated me to explore priestly studies. I for one had no knowledge of priestly studies or anything to do with the priests, but the only thing I knew and also usually heard from people is that they were the men of God because they lived holy lives; they were men of prayer and they represented the figure of Jesus Christ here on earth. At this point of time when I was experiencing this thought within my own self I didn't even tell anyone about this thought, not even my own parents. Sometimes I tried to ask people about the way and the lives of priests, or even I tried to talk to these two brothers, but I usually felt I didn't have enough courage to talk about these things because I thought people or even my friends might make fun of me or would criticize me for my thoughts.

After my Christmas holiday I went back to complete my grade twelve studies in the year 2015. The year was filled with enjoyment and preparations for the pioneer grade twelves of Palmalmal Secondary School. Thus, I was also very happy that year because I was one of the pioneer grade twelves going to graduate that year, and also it was a memorable thing that I will always never forget in my life. It was after many years that our people have been fighting

hard for us to have our own secondary, and at last we finally made it. However, out of many grade twelve students that year I was the only student from my village (Pomio) to graduate as a pioneer grade twelve students that year 2015. By the way, during my year of grade twelve studies the thought to enter seminary was still popping up in my mind. Sometimes this had started to make me to reflect back to my past life that I have lived, and I really felt sorry and guilty about such a life that I have lived with my friends. The motivation to enter seminary was not through any saint or any scriptural texts, but it was through my admiration of my two brothers. Their way of life was so inspiring to me to really search what is the true life that God wanted me to live. The term one break has gone and we were now beginning our term two when I received a phone call from Brother Cornelius Gaga. During our conversation I was so surprised when he started to talk to me about the life in the seminary, and this really motivated me to enter as soon as possible if I completed my grade twelve. The days and the months of the year 2015 slowly started to count down but I did not tell anyone, not even my own parents. I started to realise what was God's plan for my life, and I slowly started to change my attitudes and my behaviours. I started to attend church services in the school during Sundays, I involved myself in church activities in the school, and I started to isolate myself from my friends. I was so much inspired by the way and the kind of life lived by priests; they were humble, full of love, men of God. They lived holy lives, were simple people, they brought many souls to God, and they lived without families, but they were always happy and were there ready to support any person with their problems or troubles they faced in life.

The thought of entering the seminary was always in my mind until it was term two of the year 2015 when I went home for the holiday, and I met with Fr. Clarence and without any further delay I asked him about the address of Rapolo Seminary, and by surprise to me, he gave it immediately to me. At that point, after receiving the address of the seminary I tried to talk to my parents about my thought of entering the seminary, and they both really supported me about my idea. I was so happy about their consent of entering the seminary, and also they both tried to give me advice that I can say that they really motivated me about entering the seminary. After our holiday I went back to the school to continue on with my term three of schooling and after one week I wrote my first letter of interest to the Vocation Director of the Sacred Heart Seminary Rapolo who was that time was Fr. Richard Koisilia. Thus, I thought the response to my interest letter would be quick - as soon as possible - but I waited for almost two months. By that time I thought the vocation director of the seminary did not want me to enter the seminary; however, it was before I sat for my national examinations, almost two weeks before, when I was summoned to see my academic teacher in his office. Being so confused about what to say, I just went to see him in his office. First I thought that I had done something wrong, and I was so afraid because it was getting near to our exams. With a confused mind I walked into his office, and from there I was so surprised when he called my name and he handed me a letter. After I received the letter I thanked him, and I rushed back into my room, and I sat down to see the letter. Although I saw the name of the vocation director written on the cover of the letter, I was having the negative thought about what I was expecting inside the letter. However to my surprise I saw an acceptance letter of entering the seminary the following year, 2016. At that moment of time I was really filled with joy and happiness, but I did not tell anyone, neither my friends nor my parents. The examination was soon over and I went back home, but when I arrived at home I found out that a few people - even both my parents - already knew that I was entering the seminary the following year. Thus, I later found out that they were being told by my dean priest who was that time Fr Rudolf Pakao.

Finally on the year 2016 I entered Sacred Heart Major Seminary Rapolo to begin my propaedeutic year one studies. The life in the seminary was now totally distinct from my previous life, my life at home, and the life in the high school and secondary. In the beginning of my school year I felt homesick, but after that I started to feel that I really loved to live in the seminary. I came to encounter peace within me, and also I saw that I had many times to talk to God in prayers. After all I really loved to be a seminarian praying as my first priority in the seminary, studying to deepen my faith in God, and merely living in the seminary. After two years of propaedeutic studies in Sacred Heart Seminary from the year 2016 to 2017 I was sent to St. Fidelis (Madang) under the Capuchins to do my Spiritual Year in 2018. After completing my spiritual year at St Fidelis I proceeded on to do my philosophy and theology studies at Catholic Theological Institute in Bomana Holy Spirit Seminary. Thank God for calling me to live such a life by being the servant of his Son to preach and show his face to the poor. The saint that really inspired me so much in the seminary and also my patron saint was Saint Matthew the tax collector.