

My name is Bernard Tohian, I originated from Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. I was born on the 11th of May 1996, the fourth child out of eight siblings: three girls and five boys. My parents received the sacrament of matrimony in 1991. As a member of a strong practicing Catholic family, I was baptized on the 30th of November 1999, followed by the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, then the sacrament of Confirmation. Abraham is my confirmation name. I began my elementary school in 2003 and completed primary school in 2012. I entered Christ the King, Papitalai Secondary in 2013 and studied biology, chemistry and mathematics, since I wished to be a doctor. Three weeks before my final exam, I heard for the first time the school chaplain announce that interested candidates to enter the seminary would be sitting for their entry test. I sat for the entry test with the other thirteen students without any attention to what I was doing. The next afternoon the vocation director invited me and asked me some unexpected private questions. After my final exam in 2016, I received two acceptance letters, the first was to enter Sacred Heart Inter-diocesan Major Seminary Rapolo at East New Britain and the second to study science and technology in higher education that is government sponsored.

I was in desolation whether to be a student priest or a science student. My parents were subsistence farmers. They had sent me to be adopted by my aunty in town since I was five years old. My aunty was a single for life; she worked as a cleaner, so sometimes I felt lonely when she went for work. She was very old when I entered the secondary school. Secretly my vocation started because of her love and faithfulness to the sacraments of confession and Eucharist. We attended every Sunday mass. Sometimes she sacrificed her work and time to be involved in church activities. I am the financial hope of the family when I find a job. My parent value education so they feed pigs, cultivated rubber and harvested garden products in the village. They sold them just for the school fee. I surprised my entire family and community when I rejected the government offer with the free tickets and choose to the enter seminary. My family respected my decision and struggled to pay for my tickets and school fee in the seminary as well as my other brothers' and sisters' school fees. My community is isolated from the parish and the priest visits once a year. My first time in life to visit my parish church is after my first year holiday in the seminary.

It was very difficult for me to adapt into a solid formation, so I planned to leave the seminary secretly after week five, but through the grace of God my plan failed. There were thirty students in our class. I was among the six accepted students to continue my studies this year. In the seminary formation my vocation becomes clearer in the challenges I encounter. It is not my family vocation but God's call for me. I have committed myself in seminary studies, I have centered Christ as my model in preparing myself to go forth as the witness of Christ. Growing in human formation helps me to be responsible, take initiative and seek the common good as a steward.

The bishop sent me last year to Saint Fidelis Seminary in Madang for spiritual growth. This year he sent me to Holy Spirit Seminary in Port Moresby to study at Catholic Theological Institute. Now am doing my philosophical studies in preparation for theological studies. The vocation journey is not easy. I still have eight years more to go. Like Saint Peter says in 1 Peter 5:8, "Be ready. Your enemy is like a hungry lion looking for someone to eat." I trust that true life is in God. I was troubled by my best high school friend studying to be a teacher. He met me and told me that you will just smell the priestly life but you will fall. I feel guilty because he knew me in high school, and I don't expect that words to happen. I was silent and he left me immediately but I whispered to myself, I am not the same Bernard as three years ago in high school. The formula of Jesus' love, death to oneself. There are many good things as a young man I have to let go for example the wealth, family bond, evil practices, best friends and beautiful girlfriends. I have to accept the pain and ask mother Mary to accompany me to follow his Son Jesus. In my diocese I am the only seminarian studying in the seminary, so please pray for more Holy Vocation to priestly life and religious life in the world.

My vocational phrase is John 15:13, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." In my vocation journey I love to be a disciple first before being a priest. God bless you for reading my ongoing vocation story.