

Article by Seminarian Raphael Akurugu:

I come from a family of seven. Both of my parents have died, but I am the “baby” of four brothers. Yes, no girl. Three of my siblings live in Ghana in a town called Bolgatanga, where we were all born and grew up. The other sibling lives in England with his family because he is married to a British woman. Three of my four brothers are married and two have children, making me a proud uncle of two nieces and four nephews.

My siblings and I had the faith nurtured in us through our mom. Her name is Victoria, and she was a devout woman. Though I went to Church and participated in parish and youth activities, I wasn't baptized until I was in high school at the age of 18 (only God knows why I was not baptized earlier in my childhood). Shortly after my mom died, I intentionally re-engaged in my Catholic faith. I knew for sure it was the one thing my mom desired most for me, but, even more, it was the wonderful plan God had for me.

As a child growing up, I admired and loved the priest, but this died out as I grew into adolescence and only reawakened when I was 16 years old. I was sure it was what I wanted to do, and, even more now, I am sure it is what God wants of me. After I graduated high school in 2008, I applied to enter seminary and started formation to be a Catholic priest for my diocese in Ghana. Praise be to God, I was admitted through the Vocation Director at the time, Fr Solomon Yinwat, who is currently studying at St Thomas University in St. Paul. I started seminary formation in the fall of 2009 and have since been walking with the Lord, praying, listening, and discerning what beautiful plan He has in store for me.

I had a year of spiritual formation and philosophy in college. In the fall of 2013, I started to study Theology. I had finished three semesters before being asked by my Bishop, Alfred Agyenta, together with another seminarian, Gabriel Ayamdoor (who is currently at St Jude of the Lake in Mahtomedi for the summer), to come to the United States to continue my formation to the priesthood.

Lo and behold, I arrived in Minnesota in the winter of 2015, February 2nd. I never imagined how cold the temperature could get. The fact that it even freezes here opened a whole new and adventurous chapter of my life.

I enrolled at the Saint Paul Seminary upon my arrival and began my studies soon thereafter. I've come to learn that Fr Rask was once rector of this seminary. Also, it was at this seminary where I met Fr Stiles, who was there with me for one semester before he graduated and was ordained a priest.

I just completed my second year of theological formation, and, God willing, will be ordained a deacon in May of next year here in the Archdiocese and ordained a priest in 2018 in my home diocese in Ghana. I invite you all to my ordinations, especially the one in Ghana!

From the start of my journey in seminary, each moment has been filled with grace, for which I remain ever grateful to God. The best vocation testimony I can give of my journey and discernment is that, God, who had set me apart before I was born, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son Jesus to me that I might preach Him (cf. Gal. 1,15-16). It has been seven years of totally unmerited grace and blessing, yet not without the ‘hide and seek’ God plays with those on whom He lavishes His love. Praised be God!

My heart is filled with great joy and excitement to be with you all. I look forward to learning and growing in my fervent “yes” to the Lord during the time I will be with the family of St. Odilia. I am truly blessed to be among you! Thank you.