

Rev. Freddy Chua

Vocation Story

I grew up in a large Catholic family in the Philippines. Since I was baptized and confirmed as a baby, I never attended any religious education classes until I was a freshman in college. My professor in Religion was a former seminarian. One day our topic was about Jesus and Discipleship. He asked the whole class to close our eyes and listen to John Denver's song "Follow Me." He somehow made a connection between the lyrics of the song and Jesus' call to discipleship. Then he challenged us to be disciples and be active in our respective churches. So I did!

I like singing, so I joined the church choir. I was fortunate that the director of the group was a very spiritual man. He instilled in us a strong love of God, a love for the Church, and a sense of service to other people. Twice a month, the group would visit an orphanage or a hospice for elderly people picked up from the streets. We also helped raise money for different organizations by having concerts and doing Christmas caroling. I became very active in the church community. I started attending daily Mass regularly. Then I got to know the priests in the parish. I started hanging around them and saw the impact they made in the lives of the people who came to them for help. But I kept the idea of priesthood to myself and decided not to tell anyone. I didn't want to be pressured into entering the seminary until I was sure.

After graduating from college and taking the CPA board examination, I got hired as a staff auditor in the largest accounting firm in the country. I liked the people I worked with, the challenge of the work, and the frequent traveling. After a few months, the novelty of work started wearing off. I found myself looking forward more to my weekend activities in the church. I moved on to a second job and then a third; each with a better position and a higher salary than the previous. But I was not satisfied. I was looking for something more. All the time, the thought of entering the seminary never left me.

In September of 1990, I came to California to work. I thought I would forget about the priesthood because I was earning more money and enjoying more personal freedom. For a while I enjoyed my independence. But the restlessness came back. I joined the local church choir and started helping in the parish as a sacristan during weekends. In the same year, an old friend from the Philippines invited me to attend a motivational seminar. I discovered that what was most important for me was to be a priest. After that weekend, I told the associate pastor that I was thinking of going to the seminary. He put me in contact with the Vocation Director who helped me through the discernment and application process. Then I called my parents at home in the Philippines. I was on the phone talking with my mother when I said, "Ma, I'm going to enter the seminary and study for the priesthood." There was complete silence on the other end of the line. After what seemed to be 15 or 20 seconds, I heard my father's voice. I told him the same thing I told my mother. He congratulated me and told me that he was happy for me. A few months after that call, when I was already in St. John's Seminary, I learned what had happened that night. My mother was so

surprised by what I told her that she fainted. She knew that I was always active in the Church, but she never had any idea that I wanted to be a priest. I guess nobody ever did, except the One who said, "Follow me."