

## **Seminarian Profile: Daniel Thelen**

This year I have the blessing to begin my studies in theology. I am very much looking forward to the challenges and joys of digging into scripture and discovering the depth and power of God's Holy Word! In addition to this transition, I will also begin my studies in Rome, Italy at the Pontifical North American College. I am deeply humbled to have this opportunity. The city of Rome will in itself teach me much about the faith. The countless holy sites are a great source of information about the history and richness of Catholicism and the proximity to the Holy Father will no doubt impress upon me a very real understanding of the church's universality. Therefore, I pray that this wonderful gift will enrich my priesthood so that I may more profoundly serve God and his people.

Prior to my studies in Rome, I studied at Mundelein Seminary near Chicago. One of the key areas of growth for myself during this time was a deeper understanding of who I am. This self awareness allowed me to more effectively reach out to others through various ministries. For instance, I was able to lead a Communion service for elderly Catholics, instruct youth for preparation of the Sacraments, and conduct a Christian discussion session. I was also blessed to take a mission trip to Mali, Africa. This experience has given me a profound understanding of the beauty of humanity in every corner of the world. The Malian people continue to be in my prayers, and though they suffer in many ways, they are deeply blessed with strong families and communities which seem to radiate a joy that is sometimes lost in our western world.

My vocation story, however, begins long before my seminary experiences listed above. I grew up on a small dairy farm in Clear Lake, Wisconsin. My family instilled a strong Catholic identity within me from my youth. We prayed the rosary often and were quite involved in our local church. I really appreciate the constant love and devotion my parents had for each other and their witness to a strong marriage.

At about the age of 10 I felt a call to the priesthood and made a career day poster on this vocation. However, the idea slowly slipped away and by the time I was discerning colleges, seminary was far from my mind. I eventually went to UW-River Falls and obtained a major in horticulture in the spring of 2003. Since then I have worked at a tree nursery, as a landscape designer, and as a delivery driver.

During this time I kept my Catholic faith alive but it was becoming drier and drier. I had struggled with depression in high school and anxiety in college, so this fear complex made life difficult for me. So much so that I had a very difficult time socializing and relaxing. It also truncated my relationship with God, because I maintained my faith primarily out of fear of Hell rather than for love of Him.

However during the year of 2007, I was blessed to find Notre Dame Parish in Chippewa Falls. Through this parish and the parish community God began to speak to me in my heart. He opened my heart to His love, to the beauty of the faith, and to this wonderful treasure that we call Catholicism. I slowly began to develop a prayer life and a love for God which began to heal

my anxiety in social situations. I was able to be vulnerable with people which allowed me to foster genuine relationships with people.

Because of this awakening, I began to explore the depth of our faith with intense fervor. I fell in love with spiritual reading and rediscovered the jewels of our faith from the real presence in the Eucharist, to Marian apparitions, to saints, to miracles, etc.

Our parish at Notre Dame is blessed to have perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. When I discovered this treasure, the seeds of a vocation were planted once again in my mind. I felt great reluctance to pursue a vocation because of my history with anxiety and nervousness. But through adoration I began to learn to trust in God. I wanted to give everything I could back to the church as a result of this experience. Therefore, after some discernment I decided to contact our vocation director, Father Hirsch.

By taking this step, which was very 'scary' at the time, I began to meet many other young men pursuing a similar vocation at the Threshold Retreat in 2008. I learned that I was not alone and that the faith was vibrant in the hearts of many other young men.

Now as I begin my studies in theology, I thank God for the journey he has brought me on. He has blessed me in innumerable ways, and I pray that I will be able to daily embrace the humility necessary to be a holy priest, a priest that will faithfully serve Christ and his people with a joyful heart.