“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”
Jeremiah 1:5

The vocation to the priesthood is not something that a man chooses, but rather a call that he responds to. God is the one who chooses. He doesn’t choose the most qualified, but he qualifies the ones that he calls to do his work, to lead souls on the road to salvation.

Join the Legion, see the world!

Well, that is not exactly the reason that I began this journey to the priesthood within the Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ, but it has certainly a blessing for me. Being an international congregation the Legion has centers throughout the entire globe and by the grace of God I’ve been asked to move around quite a bit. God knows exactly what we need and when we need it.

When did this whole journey begin? It is hard to put a date and place on it for me as to when it all began for me. It wasn’t an angel in bright light or a voice from the heavens. I think that throughout my entire life I was enriched with knowing many people and have always sought to discover the best in everyone and try to imitate that. For me the figure of the priest has always been something outstanding. It takes a lot to dedicate your whole life to serving others. In a sense, I consider my recognizing my vocation part of the vocation of my family. Little by little we’ve gone about becoming more “faithful Catholics” together. Sometimes mom and dad were breaking the trail, us kids were dragging behind at times. Then, at a certain point I think God used us to take the front line. Now, we take turns helping each other mutually grow in our faith and relationship with Christ.

Throughout my childhood and teen years the Church was always present. Sometimes my siblings and I were “kindly invited by mom” to help cleaning the pews under orders from mom or working on the Church property to trim bushes or rake leaves. We spent time in and outside the Church. I got to know a number of priests, both diocesan and religious. Still, within me, the desire to follow in their footsteps didn’t begin to grow until the end of High School and didn’t crystalize until I’d made a commitment to dedicate more of my time to Christ. Little by little I formed a desire to service and to make others happy by what I do and commit myself to.
Finishing High School, I was invited by my spiritual director to consider the idea of spending a year before college as a volunteer for the Regnum Christi Movement. It sounded like something very attractive to me, although I didn’t make any commitment at the time. As graduation approached I began to consider the possibility more seriously and in the end made a small act of generosity that God used to begin a great work in my soul. This is a pattern in my life that looking back I recognize more and more. God takes our little acts of love and multiplies them infinitely. From this year of service work was born a vocation and from this vocation a desire to respond generously to the call.

**Rome sweet home!**

Before entering the novitiate in Cheshire I did a formation course for a month, spiritual exercises for a week and was present in St. Peter’s square for Pope Benedict XVI’s election, each on a different trip! There has always been something about Rome that has attracted me and drawn me back. Little did I know that I’d end up spending 5 more years studying and evangelizing in Rome before being sent on my apostolic mission as a priest.

Toward the end of high school I followed in the footsteps of my older sister, Carrie, who had given a year of service work with Regnum Christi. I thought it was something very impressive that she would take a year off from going to university to go wherever they sent her and not be paid for it. There has always been a special bond between the two of us, and this certainly had something to do with my decision to do the same in 2004. Later that year she entered the Consecrated life in Regnum Christi.

I was assigned to work in Washington D.C. with adolescents and youth. There were a number of boys’ clubs that I visited with a Legionary brother and we also ran camps in Virginia, Delaware and North Carolina. It was a year of a lot of growth for me. I was learning life skills and dealing with all kinds of people while struggling to give the best of myself to others.

Toward the end of the year I was beginning to feel a tug in my heart to see about doing another year of service work. It had helped me a lot and I wanted to continue on the path of being an instrument of God in the lives of others. It all became quite clear one night during week-long spiritual exercises in Rome kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the chapel of the Center for Higher Studies. I felt a deep peace in my heart and a clear idea in my mind, I needed to go to the candidacy in Cheshire in the summer to “taste and see” if God was calling me to the priesthood.

**The adventure begins**

Oftentimes formation years seem eternal. There was no exception in my case. But now, looking back at eleven years of formation, I ask myself “where did the time go?” As one gets older, the years go faster and faster. There is a point where a semester passes in the blink of an eye.

From the moment I entered the novitiate I have felt the hand of God in my life. By no means have these years all been easy. God is a good Father and goes about forming us in many ways.

Looking back, I can see clearly that the experiences that God allowed me to have all been a preparation for what has followed and what is awaiting me in the future. All the souls that God has allowed me to come into contact with have been for me a gift. I am certain that each and every person has given me something that has helped me in my apostolic life up to this point and what is awaiting me in the future.

My first years on the apostolate were spent in the Apostolic School in New Hampshire as an assistant of pre-candidates in the minor seminary. It was a moment of learning the art of working with adolescents and accompanying them in their spiritual
life while I also grew in mine. This has been my experience in working with young people throughout my legionary formation. I always find myself excited about giving and then end up receiving so much more.

Returning to Rome for my studies I was blessed to continue to work in the Parish of Gran Madre di Dio in Ponte Milvio and a few activities with groups of young people while balancing with my studies. I came back with a great desire to serve the people that God put on my path. I found myself surrounded by a beautiful family at the parish and many new friends that have supported me throughout this journey with their prayers and example.

Another blessing upon returning to Rome was to be among so many of my legionary brothers, many of whom I hadn’t seen for a few years, and spend this last stretch before ordination accompanied by and accompanying them. The family spirit that we live in the Legion has always been a clear sign for me that God is calling me to this life. To have so many brothers who are there to support, who are on the same journey, who share their experiences, blessings and sufferings is priceless in the life of a priest. When I encounter a new situation that I don’t know how to confront I know that I can go to one of my brothers who will give me advice that I can count on. This has been my experience throughout these years.

The Last Stretch

Returning for the final leg of theological studies was a reality check for me. With the rush of activity and the multiple responsibilities while I was on internship, arriving to Rome was a moment of pause. It is a strange feeling after living in the fast lane for years and then suddenly to find oneself before a stack of books trying to transfer information from them into the mind.

I went from praying my morning meditation when I wasn’t waking up the boys for the day or leading their meditation before Mass to having an entire hour to spend with Christ. It was like a breath of fresh air for my spiritual life. These last years have helped me to value how important prayer life is for the life of a priest. It is from prayer that we draw our strength.

Another reflection that comes forward in this moment is that the priesthood is too great for me! I cannot possibly fulfill all that Christ is asking of me! It is too much! Drawing near to the diaconate ordination this was constantly on my mind. I need to trust in God to persevere in this vocation. There are so many souls that are counting on my priestly vocation and God has chosen me as his instrument of mercy, but I must abandon myself to his hands completely. This has been my prayer in this last stretch. After spiritual exercises during Holy Week I was able to find this peace that I was looking for. It was in prayer, no longer simply a logical idea that occurred to me, that I found peace. Jesus Christ gave me this grace of abandonment to his grace. I pray every day for perseverance in this vocation and for each and every one of the souls that God will put in the path of my priestly ministry.
He was born in Olympia Fields, Illinois on November 11, 1985, second of 5 children. Michael grew up in Michigan playing sports and working different jobs. He was always nurtured by the faith in his adolescent years and through high school, attending retreats, conventions, missions in Mexico and World Youth Day in Toronto. Finishing High School he did a year of service work as a volunteer with the Legionaries of Christ in Washington, D.C. His thoughts began to turn seriously to the priesthood during this year of service work. He entered the novitiate of the Legionaries of Christ in Cheshire, CT in 2005, then was sent to Dublin, Ireland for his second year of novitiate where he professed his first vows. In 2007 he did his classical studies in Salamanca, Spain before arriving to Rome for philosophy studies. The Legion asked him to work in two minor seminaries following these studies and then he returned to Rome to finish up the Ecclesiastical Studies with 3 years of theology. Eleven years later he is just a few small steps from being a “Priest forever in the line of Melchizedek” (Heb. 7:17)