

June 2008

## Vocations Hero

It's that time of the year, when those who have been preparing for ordination are ordained, and when those seminarians come home for the summer to do ministry in parishes. I was reflecting on both ends of that spectrum in my life in the past days. I was ordained on June 4, 1993. And I was thinking of back to the first summer I spent as a seminarian in parish life. It was the summer after I graduated from college (I'd spent the previous two summers working at summer camps).

In the summer of 1988 I was assigned to the [Cathedral parish in Crookston](#) as a seminarian. I had many memorable experiences. Of all my interactions that summer, though, I remember one that happened mostly by chance (or was it providence?).

I was out for a stroll around the grounds of Mount St. Benedict monastery one afternoon, when I saw a priest also out strolling. The thing that made me curious was that he was not a priest of our Diocese, at least no one I'd ever met. He greeted me cordially, and said, "I'm Fr. John Wald." He told me he had grown up in the Crookston and Fisher area, and that he'd become a member of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) and was currently assigned to a mission in Papua New Guinea. He went on to explain that he was home on a vacation and visiting relatives in the area, including some of the Sisters of St. Benedict.

I listened as he told me how he'd left the United States in 1944, not long after his ordination to the priesthood, bound for Papua New Guinea; and how he and his companions had remained in Australia until it was deemed safe enough for them to go to their mission.

He said over the years he'd held every position in the diocese he served in New Guinea (except bishop); but his favorite, and the one he kept until his retirement at age 85, was Vocation Director. Fr. John wrote in 2005, "Our aim was, to establish the Church, with its own priests and Bishops....most of the parishes of the Kundiawa Diocese are staffed by Native Diocesan Priests, all of whom I had

recruited and guided along their seminary years....we expect the next bishop to be a native.”

Here was a man from our little diocese in northwest Minnesota who spent his adult life sharing the love of Christ on the other side of the world. Our brief encounter, not more than 40 minutes, had a a lasting impact on my life and on my desire to be a priest. Although we never met again, Fr. John served as a hero for me ever since. A few weeks ago a relative of his asked me to pray for him because he was unwell and was praying that the Lord would take him home. Two days later, on May 22nd, he fell asleep in the Lord, at age 92.

Allow me to conclude with a prayer from the Order of Christian Funerals:

Faithful God,

we humbly ask your mercy for your servant Fr. John,

who worked so generously to spread the Good News:

grant him the reward of his labors

and bring him safely to your Promised Land.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.