

FROM LOST to FOUND

Seminarian Discovers Happiness in Religious Formation

After high school, Angel Rodriguez Fuentes took a gap year and moved to Mexico to live with his grandmother. He needed time to think about his future.

He pondered his purpose, questioned his faith and wondered about the essence of happiness. After some time, Angel turned to God and prayed.

“I said ‘God, show me – if you’re real, let me feel something or let me see you or something.’ And I remember during those periods, I felt so much love that I can’t even explain it,” he said. “It was love and happiness and peace. The feeling was beautiful.”

Angel felt that he had his answer.

➔ Searching For a Place to Belong

After that, he started attending Mass daily. A person at church noticed and invited him to join vocation meetings. Curious to learn more, Angel went to a few monthly sessions before returning to Texas to be with his family.

He took a job at the oil refineries and continued his regular Mass attendance. Angel decided to return to Mexico, the homeland of his parents and his childhood, to enter a seminary. He visited one, submitted his application and was accepted. Things seemed to be falling into place.

But the week before Angel was set to begin his formation program at the seminary in Mexico, he got very sick. The doctors told him he’d need surgery to fix his stomach issues. Since he had American health insurance, he was sent back to the U.S. and advised to reapply to the seminary again the following year after his recovery.

Once he was back in Texas, Angel underwent further



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medical tests. Doctors identified a minor issue that could be easily resolved. Although he was initially disappointed about missing the opportunity at the seminary, Angel now believes this was part of God's intention for him.

The plan all started to unfold when Angel learned that his hometown priest was being reassigned and the parish was going to be managed by Divine Word Missionaries. Intrigued by the charm of the congregation, Angel delved into learning more about the Society of the Divine Word. Just a few years earlier when he was 15, his family had taken a trip to Europe that sparked a desire in him to explore the world.

After connecting with a vocation director and visiting Divine Word College, Angel quickly noticed a distinct difference in the dynamic between the priests and seminarians compared to the first seminary he considered. It felt like everyone was on the same level.

"The Divine Word Missionaries talked to everybody and they were so nice," he said. "I was like, wow, if God calls me to be a priest, then I want to be like that."

➔ **Navigating Cultural Differences**

Angel started classes in August 2023. Looking back at his first year of school, he appreciates that the formation program is designed to form candidates spiritually, intellectually and personally. As the only Mexican-American student on campus, he's learned a lot from the diverse student body. The interculturality has proven to be both the most challenging and the most rewarding aspect of his experience at DWC.

"We're all different but I've learned many things from those differences, which I'm really grateful for," he said.

Angel made friends with a group of Burmese students who have been teaching him about their culture. They shared a traditional snack with him called lapet thoke, a tea leaf salad. They explained that it's customary in Myanmar for people to make this dish when friends come over and share it while they catch up. Angel liked the concept so much that he went to the Asian market and bought ingredients to make the dish for his friends so he could return the favor.

"I found a group of friends who I can be myself around and we talk about these cultural issues," he said. "It helps us all grow."

➔ **Serving God and Others**

When he visits his home parish, Angel said he's a little uncomfortable being held up as an example because he doesn't see himself as any different than the other young people at his church. He's just looking to find the right path and right now, he believes God is calling him to religious life as a priest.

"It doesn't matter what vocation we have," Angel said. "It doesn't matter if you're a priest, married, a layperson or anything. I just want people to know that we all can serve God in many ways. And just by pursuing the priesthood, we're not more special than people who have a family. We can all show Christ in ourselves, by our actions and by the way we live our daily life and help others."