

From Kenya to St. Leo's....

It's been an unexpected and winding journey that brought seminarian Ben Lotiang'a from rural Kenya to seminary in Cincinnati and internship at St. Leo's, but it's a path that has God's fingerprints all over it.

Ben was born in Kakuma Turkana County, Kenya, the son of a widowed mother and two younger siblings. He is the only educated person in his family and this was made possible through the support of friends and missionaries including the Ed Colina Foundation which was founded by a Cincinnati educator with a heart for expanding opportunities for poor youth in Kenya.

His mother introduced him to the devotional life of the Church and his faith has been a guiding force since his youth. He was attracted to priesthood by the lives of Catholic missionaries who evangelized and served his Turkana community through their ministries and the witness of their simple living and prayer life. Ben lived with the Camillian missionaries as a seminarian for eight years, visiting the sick in hospitals and the poor in settlements. This provided an opportunity for his prayer life to blossom and for him to experience community living and get to know people of diverse backgrounds and personalities. After discerning that the Camillians were not a fit for him, Ben voluntarily left that community and sought employment.

His experience with the missionaries, his work with the sick, and his prayer life led him to seek employment with organizations working with the marginalized and chronically ill. He first worked as program director of Soteni Kenya a non-profit that provides HIV and AIDS relief projects to Kenyan communities affected by the disease. He also worked for a crime and violence prevention project, for a pediatric HIV and AIDS hospice as a caretaker for 33 orphans, and for the US Agency for International Development in Nairobi.

Through all of these stops on his journey the call and desire for priesthood became stronger and Ben resumed his studies for priesthood at the Athenaeum and will become a priest for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. He said he sees priesthood as a call to serve both the materially and spiritually poor. "As my appreciation for the priesthood deepened so has my calling," he said. "When you see a joyful priest who gives of himself unreservedly to the people entrusted to his care, his is naturally attractive. This is the type of priest I aspire to be."

Ben will have an opportunity to minister to the diverse community at St. Leo's during his year-long internship, a step in his preparation for priesthood. Ben already speaks Swahili which is spoken and understood by many in our African community and he is learning Spanish to better communicate with our Guatemalan parishioners. He will initially spend time with various ministries and discern where God is leading him to get involved. He is likely also to take part in community activities and in ministries with some of our partner parishes. Father Jim will be his mentor and supervisor.

