



Faith and Values A journey of development

On a warm spring evening in 1970, as I stood on the small rise overlooking St. Mary's Seminary in Catonsville, Maryland, I pondered my fate. Completing my fourth year of training to become a catholic priest, at 22 years of age I was at a cross roads. Should I continue to pursue a path I had felt drawn to since the age of 13 or end this chapter of my life and move on? In the silence of the night, once again far removed from my fellow students and deep in prayer, I asked God to give me a sign: Should I leave or should I continue on? Seemingly out of nowhere a hand gently touched my shoulder. Startled, I heard a good friend ask, "Michael, what are you doing out here? Are you all right?" By this action a sign was given and the choice was made. I would surrender my pursuit of the celibate, religious life and continue my search for meaning elsewhere.

Growing up in a devoutly Catholic home in rural northern Virginia, the church was the center of our lives. My mother was secretary of the parochial elementary school we attended. My sisters and I were educated by Franciscan nuns and we sang in the church choir. Father Walsh, our pastor, was a man of authority and grace, and many men came through our parish to help him as assistant pastors. We were close to them all. I was an altar boy.

The story of Jesus enthralled me and I was moved by the dedication of these men. I felt a vocation – from the latin vocare, a calling – to be a disciple of Christ. To me that meant to be like the men I so admired and, from the bible, a healer to help the deaf to hear, the mute to speak, the blind to see, the lame to walk. I wanted to learn how to do these things and I wanted to give my life in service to my community. In the ninth grade I came to St. John Vianney High School Seminary out in Goochland for a weekend retreat. I began my seminary experience at SJV at the beginning of the 12th grade.

As sure as I was that I knew what I wanted to be when I was 17, just as powerfully did I feel lost and confused when I left the seminary but I was sure the priestly life was not for me. In the summer of 1969, when many of my friends drove north to go to Woodstock, I hitch-hiked alone across the United States. I needed to see a larger world than that which existed in Engleside, Virginia, or within the ancient walls of St. Mary's – the oldest seminary in the United States. I needed more experience than study and prayer could provide. I needed to test myself, to discover who I was, to find out how others lived. For three months I trusted my safety to the good will of strangers about which I had great confidence, a confidence that was tested many times that summer.

At 67, looking down the long tunnel of time, when I think about Faith and Values, I remember so clearly the longings of my youth and how they gave form and direction to

my life. More than anything else I felt driven to develop whatever talents and abilities were required to fulfill what was for me a sacred commission. What would it take, really, to be a disciple of Christ? What would I have to do to become this healer? I had faith that these were possible. To be of such great value to my community was the goal. How to get it done was the question!

One never knows what will be required to become someone special: priest, doctor, teacher, auditor, pilot, counselor. My journey began at 13 and continues to this day. The spiritual journey is constantly evolving, it is a process not a goal one can say is ever fully realized. The short form of my own journey has included many twists and turns:

- At age 24, a bicycle accident on my honeymoon and its consequent divorce, then a second marriage of 38 years and two amazing children;
- the acquisition of three academic degrees in psychology;
- a move to nine cities across North America for training in disciplines of counseling and the healing arts;
- studies with eastern gurus about many kinds of yoga and meditation;
- experiences with medicine men from Mexico, the Southwest and Northwest, and at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center concerning the clinical use of psychedelic substances;
- learning how to work in nature, with music, visualization, imagery and art with clients in my everyday private counseling practice.

The childlike hope of acquiring magical powers gave way slowly, over time, to the certain knowledge that the disciplined use of specific methods and techniques for exploring, expanding, and transforming consciousness can affect powerfully positive changes in many different ways. They can help:

- Those lame from depression get up and begin again to search for meaning and purpose after devastating loss;
- the deaf and mute to hear the longings of their hearts and the needs of others and begin to communicate with intuition, integrity and love;
- the blind to see creatively the dysfunctional patterns in their lives – how they form and how they can be resolved – and how old trauma can be healed so that new and more fulfilling patterns can develop and unfold.

There is a name for this kind of work. It is called psychosynthesis and its purpose is the full development and utilization of body, mind and spirit in a secular and sacred ministry.