

Alumnus Profile - Michael Brown

Restoration + Hope = Revelation

The Franciscan School of Theology is an institution of higher education here to integrate the pastoral and academic dimensions of theological study; however, for some, it has a much more restorative purpose. This is the story of one such student.

Michael (Mike) Brown was raised in the Midwest by a multi-generational family of factory workers. His path to a new life, a different life, was through a 21-year career in the Armed Forces. Little did he know the stressors combat duty would add to his life culminating in post traumatic uses of substances and a debilitating loss of hope despite the love of three children and a wife. It was the Heroes to Heroes Foundation in 2015 that brought Michael to Israel where he met the man who would introduce him to FST, a school right in his backyard, where FST “became a three-year retreat.”

After arriving in Jerusalem, Mike along with other veterans, made their way to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Through the packed area, Mike spotted a Franciscan friar and they had a nice chat. The friar then gave a quick blessing to the group and they parted ways. A few months later in California while at mass Mike looked up and low and behold, standing to his left was the same friar. When asked what brought the friar to California, the friar replied that he was an FST student. So with a GI Bill in hand, Mike headed off to school again having already received a BA in Social Sciences from Chapman University, an MA in Management from National University, a PhD. in Management from Capella University, and having served as a faculty member himself.

“I remember my first night of class was with Father Garrett on the New Testament. I was sitting there and he came in. I thought, gosh he looks good. Look at him, he's kind of tall, thin. He's got that beautiful habit. He really looks like an educated and scholarly person. And then I looked at the students and they were mostly younger than me. They were involved in ministry already, or a parish. Doing this and that. Then I said to myself, ‘What are you doing here?’ I got this tattoo on my forearm and I put a band aid over it so nobody could see this old Armed Forces tattoo. But I hung in there because I quickly realized I probably had a 10-year old’s vision of faith, our events in faith, and in the Bible. I started learning things, discovering things, and being told things I never

dreamed. There were words I needed to hear every time I went to class. The class would end, and I was like, ‘Oh, darn it. Can we go another couple of hours?’ It wasn't like a theory to prove. It wasn't something statistically plausible to analyze. It was simply reflections and faith from different aspects.”

These days Mike serves as a sponsor in the 12 Steps Program and as a mentor for the Warfighter Advance (WFA) which, among other things, provides a retreat center in D.C. near the Potomac River. When there with other veterans, Mike shares the ideals of “honesty, surrender, gratitude, and peace”. This has assisted in providing amazing, restorative guidance for fellow veterans. “I never dreamed that the thesis that I wrote at FST would be a working tool to help other people. “

Mike recalled a class with Brother Bill Short when he wrote a paper on “How did St. Francis Surrender”. This paper was one of the tools he now uses to translate Psalm 142 to help veterans surrender. “It's a very frank discussion. I remember this guy from Georgia, a big old country boy who came in tense and angry. ‘I surrender’ is not in a lot of combat veterans' vocabulary. By the end of the week at WFA he was just smiling and talking and having fun. Something sparked. He has gratitude now.”

“It's easy to see restoration in other people's lives. So now, I sit back and say, wow, this has really been wonderful. Without reservation. Really wonderful. I am very thankful to all the faculty and I'm really thankful for how they met me where I'm at. I didn't really have to try to prove myself. I could just be a student. It's so far beyond learning something about faith, it's just so far beyond that. That first class with Fr. Garrett, he was asking us what the books in the Bible were in the New Testament. We got to Revelation and of course everybody put an S on the end of it, revelations, and he said you know there is only one revelation, Jesus Christ is Lord.”

Mike spent three years at FST restoring his faith and finding hope. Now he is able to share that with others so they may know the Revelation. “By the grace of God I have peace in my life today.”

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