

## Higher Power: My Life of Service

**Michael D. Schmitz**

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*Collecting memories from ministerial work alongside ranging thoughts on a variety of topics, Higher Power is a hope-filled priest's memoir.*

Catholic priest Michael D. Schmitz's memoir *Higher Power* gathers reminiscences from a lifetime of Christian ministry.

Schmitz grew up in Minnesota in the 1960s. His childhood home was troubled by alcohol use. He took his first drink in seventh grade; later, he joined the air force, whose culture also embraced drinking. He spent time in Vietnam.

In recalling these and other experiences, such as memories of school and baseball, the book has a testimonial quality, sifting each memory for evidence of Schmitz's ultimate call to be ordained. Indeed, while drinking led Schmitz to troubled times, these prompted his ultimate evolution: in time, he left the air force, pursued sobriety, and attended seminary, embracing a life of "total service" to God and country. He spent time as a parish leader and participated in a clown ministry too.

The book takes a scrapbook approach to gathering Schmitz's memories together, leading to gaps in its emotional development. Its chapters are brief and efficient, but often too reportorial in tone; they collect the bare facts about a range of Schmitz's interests, including commentary on the arts and on serving in the Knights of Columbus. Some of their anecdotes are amusing, as with a roommate's complaint about a waterless washing machine (they'd put their soap and clothes in the dryer, as it turns out), but these are not flowed into a coherent whole.

Oftentimes, the book's presentation is too superficial or rote, hewing close to the record without fleshing Schmitz's memories out with meaning. The book uses outlines to clarify its timelines, for example, as with periods spent on various military bases. And some instances of additional commentary distract from its stories, as when engaging memories from Schmitz's time spent serving the poor in Guatemala are interrupted with advice to the audience to purchase car insurance. Still, moving memories arise, such as Schmitz visiting people in their final moments and expressing the desire to follow where God leads. All is wrapped up with a last glimpse at Schmitz's lifetime of struggles—and with the declaration that God's ways are mysterious but that Schmitz is certain that God is active and engaged in people's lives.

The swift priest's memoir *Higher Power* conveys belief that deciding to help others can lead to a satisfying and fulfilling life.

JEREMIAH ROOD (March 4, 2024)

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