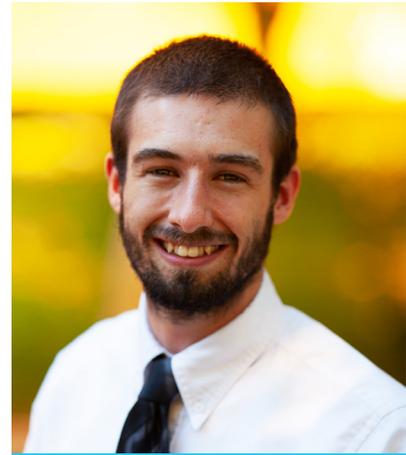


# This is my Vocation Story



Derek Edwards

**In the Beginning** Hello! My name is Derek Edwards and I am from Central Wisconsin. In my youth, my parents separated and both remarried. Between the two families, I have two younger brothers and two younger sisters. My family was not very religious, but I was baptized in a Lutheran church when I was 10 years old and we would occasionally go to weekend services. We believed in God, and while we didn't talk about Him much, He was still a presence in our lives and helped us through a lot.

**Home:** Wisconsin  
**Community:** Missionaries of The Poor  
**Degree:** History/Religious Studies  
**Alma Mater:** University of Wisconsin La Crosse  
**Occupation:** Resident Care Assistant

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**My Faith** Growing up God was an idea for me. He was removed from my life except in time of need, and not talked about very often, until my faith became something more serious later in life. I became Catholic during my junior year of high school by invitation of a friend. I believed in God before this and had seen Him as my Father, but I never really took my faith life seriously. I was confirmed in April 2013, but soon realized that my decision had been less for my relationship with the Lord and more for my friend. I had to question why I would continue to pursue a relationship with God. I turned in on myself and blocked out friends and family. I felt like I needed to reconsider whether or not I would continue to pursue my relationship with God. While I continued to go to Mass and occasionally prayed when I needed help, I 'took a break' from actively pursuing my faith, until meeting a missionary on my college campus. After a semester of failed attempts to get me to bible study, the missionary asked if I would like to come with the university's Catholic community to a faith conference in Nashville. I said yes

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*"What struck me was that I realized God had a plan and purpose for my life."*

*—Derek Edwards*

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because I desired to go to Nashville and knew that I was longing for something more. Little did I know that I'd have a powerful encounter with the Lord, and come to better understand the depths of His love, and the beauty of His Church. What struck me was that I realized God had a plan and purpose for my life. He was my Father. He was calling me to know Him deeper through the scriptures and through His people. When we returned, the missionary challenged me to

reaffirm whether or not I believed that Jesus was who He says He was, and what that meant for how I was living my life. I remember reading that, "Life begins when Jesus becomes the reason you live it." I made a commitment to truly become a disciple of Jesus and answer his call: "Follow Me." I began attending bible study, learning how to pray, and going to Mass during the week. I distanced myself from harmful friendships and finally accepted the invitation to become a part of the Catholic campus community. The friendships I made there were proof to me of God's unfathomable love and mercy, as these people radiated hope and joy—they loved me exactly for who I was. These relationships and spending time with the Lord helped me to better love my family and my friends and lead them closer to Christ.

**My Vocation** I had gone into college with the idea that I wanted to be a doctor for two major reasons: I wanted a career that would directly help relieve people's suffering and I admired the prestige of the job.

# Called to serve The Summer Class of 2018



I had never put any serious thought into a religious vocation. That was until I realized that I was dissatisfied with my studies in the sciences and found myself more drawn to classes like sociology and philosophy. I enjoyed learning about my faith and how to lead others to Christ. At the same time, I'd been taking a course in Global Health wherein we studied social injustice and poverty in Haiti. I developed a heart for the poor in a way I never had before, and felt called to devote my life to serving the poor and serving Christ. Alone in the chapel one day, I heard the call to consider discerning religious life. Over the next months, I discerned with several communities, but did not feel a strong connection until I went on a week-long mission trip to Haiti. We stayed with a group of religious brothers, the Missionaries of the Poor. These are men who dedicate their entire lives to care for the physical and spiritual needs of abandoned or ill children and adults. The sacrifice these men made and the joy with which they did it gave me chills. One night while we were listening to one of the brothers share his vocation story I had an eerie sense that perhaps the Lord was inviting me to consider a vocation with these brothers. I was so moved by these brothers and by encountering the living, suffering Christ on the cross in some of the most vulnerable of whom they served day in and out. The next morning in the chapel while looking at an image of Mary, I heard in my heart, "Do it for Jesus. Do whatever He tells you." After a summer of discernment and prayer, God directed me to discern with the Missionaries of the Poor. I felt called to live a simple life of service to offer my life in "joyful service to Christ on the cross" as is the charism and lifestyle of the MOP brothers.

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*"...While looking at an image of Mary, I heard in my heart, 'Do it for Jesus. Do whatever He tells you.'"*

*—Derek Edwards*

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**Called to Serve** After about two years of prayer and learning about the community, I've decided to pursue a vocation as a brother with the Missionaries of the Poor. One of the brothers challenged me on a discernment visit, "are you going to be a would-be follower of Christ?" He challenged me to consider that whatever my vocation may be, it is always going to be the narrow path. I believe that I am being asked to walk the narrow path with the Missionaries of the Poor. I have been

blessed with dear friends who encourage me to daily pursue the call and who by their love and faith reveal to me the Father's love.

The Missionaries of the Poor are an international religious order of men and women who take vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and free service to the poor, with 14 established missions worldwide. They live a life of prayer and service. The primary apostolate of the MOP is to care for the immediate needs of the poor. The brothers and sisters facilitate homes for adults and children with disabilities or who have been left by their families. They also seek to meet the spiritual needs of the communities where they stay, and welcome volunteers to work alongside them in their daily lives of prayer and work. While I have made the decision to pursue a vocation with the Missionaries of the Poor, my student loan debt is the only barrier preventing me from doing so. While I feel called to go as soon as possible, I recognize this barrier as an opportunity to grow, and to invite others into my vocation.

**Prayer & Invitation** I have been accepted into the community contingent on the resolution of my student debt. Therefore, with the help of the Labouré Society, I am humbly asking for your assistance. I extend to you my gratitude and prayers, and ask for your prayers for my fellow aspirants and me, the Missionaries of the Poor, and my friends and family. May the Lord bless and keep you always. To learn more about my story, please contact me at: [derek@laboureaspirant.org](mailto:derek@laboureaspirant.org).

-Derek Edwards

**LABOURÉ**

HELP RESCUE VOCATIONS

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## Why I'm Writing

*I am not only an aspirant to religious life; I am also a fundraiser for a class of aspirants pursuing the priesthood or religious life.* A recent study confirmed that nearly 1 out of 2 aspirants have student loans debt which prevents them from entering their seminaries and religious communities. It is the only thing that prevents many – including me – from entering formation to become a priest, sister or brother.

*I am seeking to raise the average aspirant student loan amount of \$60,000 before December 31st for The Labouré Society, a Catholic non-profit that helps aspirants like me.* Every aspirant has been accepted by their diocese or community and is required to work and liquidate their assets as to be able to make their own maximum loan payments. Through Labouré, my fellow aspirants and I work together as a class raising donations which will be divided amongst the class and ultimately applied to our remaining student loans. We are blessed to have this opportunity to share our love for God, our vocation stories, and to invite hundreds of individuals to support vocations like ours by financially investing in our future and the future of the church.

*At the beginning of our class, we met and participated in an intensive 3-day training on the ethics, practice, and spirituality of fundraising.* We are learning practical skills that will help us now and in our future vocations. We have also developed as a team to learn from and support each other. You can see our picture below.

*At the end of our class, Labouré will issue awards to each aspirant based on individual effort and the total funds raised.* They will administer the awards while we are in formation over a three year period (you can learn more about the program on the back of this letter). If we leave formation for any reason, we will resume our own payments.

*Will you join our vocational journeys?* Please partner with us and be part of our vocation team so we can answer God's call together!

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# LABOURÉ

*Summer 2018 Class of Aspirants to the Priesthood and Religious Life*



*Our vocations story videos are online at: [www.RescueVocations.org](http://www.RescueVocations.org)*

# About The Labouré Society

## Why is our Rescue Mission needed?

- There are an estimated 10,000 individuals discerning a priestly or religious vocation in the US annually
  - 42% are blocked from pursuing this call due to education loans\*
  - The average vocational 'aspirant' in Labouré owes \$60,000 in education loans
  - Most religious communities cannot assume this debt
  - Most dioceses will allow some debt but have a limited threshold for acceptance
- \* (NRVC, Vision Study, 2010)

## How does our Rescue Mission work?

### *Our Aspirants:*

- Discern a vocation and are accepted into a diocese or religious institute\*
  - Are blocked from entering or continuing vocational formation due to student loans
  - Apply to Labouré and meet intake requirements
  - Are trained in Catholic based fundraising and provided practical tools, personal mentoring, & accountability
  - Share their vocation stories with hundreds of donors thereby building a culture of vocations and evangelization
  - Raise funds for Labouré collectively as a class of multiple aspirants
  - Receive monetary awards from the funds raised by the class
  - Have minimum monthly award payments made to their student loan agencies over 36 months of active formation.
  - Receive final award payout after 3 years and enter freely into a lifetime of service as a priest, sister, or brother
- \*(The Institute must be listed in the Official Catholic Directory)

### *The Labouré Society*

- Works with aspirants to utilize all personal means to mitigate their loan amount (loan consolidation, asset review, financial counseling, employment, etc.) prior to acceptance into the program
- Trains each aspirant in Catholic based philanthropy
- Forms a semi-annual 'class' of aspirants that raises funds collectively for all members of the class
- Mentors each aspirant to build a unified team; each individual works toward the collective goal
- Provides ongoing accountability to ensure proper preparation & completion of personal fundraising plans
- Equips each aspirant with an online fundraising platform for donation processing, reporting, marketing and communications, assessment of goals, and class interaction
- Facilitates ongoing aspirant/donor communication and updates after aspirant enters formation
- Manages aspirant award payments while they are in formation
- Completes award payout after three years active formation

## What has the Labouré Rescue Mission accomplished?

- Operating since 2003
- Listed in the Official Catholic Directory
- 280+ assisted into formation to the priesthood or religious life
- A network of thousands of praying bishops, priests, religious, families, and singles
- Over \$6 million awarded to aspirants for loan mitigation
- Labouré program support from bishops, superiors, and vocation directors nationwide

**LABOURÉ**  
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The Labouré Society is a recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofit, and is listed in the Official Catholic Directory. All donations are tax deductible. Gifts solicited by our aspirants belong to Labouré and are dispersed upon board approved guidelines to ensure full compliance with IRS rulings. Aspirants who leave Labouré are not required to repay any funds disbursed but are strongly encouraged to support Labouré however possible. Funds granted but not dispersed to a former aspirant are made available to other Labouré needs.