

This is my Vocation Story



GRETCHEN GEISHEKER

How it Began Hi, my name is Gretchen Geisheker and I am from Houston, Texas. I am 22 years old and one of two children raised in a Catholic family. In May 2017 I will graduate from the University of Dallas, a Catholic university I was blessed to attend. The seeds of my vocation were planted early when I wrote in my diary every night. As I wrote I thought I heard God calling me, in the words a child could understand, “to be a nun.”

Home:	Texas
Community:	Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist
Degree:	Psychology
Alma Mater:	University of Dallas
Occupation:	Teacher

My Faith By the grace of God, I was raised in a fervent Catholic family, and faith has always been an important part of my life. Others have helped me learn to see faith as a relationship with God not just a set of rules to live by. This understanding of God and my faith continues to this day.

My Vocation My journey to a religious vocation began when I was in elementary school. My family had gotten to know a religious community very well since they would do weekend apostolate for children. I still had a lot to learn, but God put the thought of a religious vocation in my heart at an early age through the beautiful example of these Catholic sisters. I asked my mom if it would be okay if I joined a religious community. She smiled and nodded, having always encouraged my brother and me to be open to God’s will. I kept asking that same question over and over. I felt the desire to join those Catholic sisters and to serve the Lord, with them, for the rest of my life. Just contemplating the idea filled me with great joy!

I asked my mom if I could move to Brazil to attend the boarding school of the Order as soon as possible. Since I wasn’t even in high school yet, my mom was surprised, but she was always open to God’s will.

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God provided a way as the next January I was on a plane to Brazil. Knowing all that I would learn there, I believe that God called me to go to Brazil, but I also believe He called me to go back home with my family for high school.

High school was challenging in many ways, but my faith in God helped me through it. Sadly, in high school my heart had become closed to the idea of a religious vocation. I didn’t believe God was enough, but after communion one day I heard these words echo in my head: “Fine, I’ll do it, but you’re going to have to fill my heart.” Though it was a commanding phrase, it was not one of disrespect, rather it represented the struggle deep within my heart. As soon as I said this powerful phrase, I could feel my heart open again to the thought of a religious calling. I knew that God was enough to fill my heart.

Called to serve The Winter Class of 2017



Called to Serve During college several women and I had the opportunity to visit several religious communities. Once again I found myself in love with religious life and wanted to enter as soon as possible. I struggled with knowing whether I should finish my studies at my Catholic university or join the religious community right away. Others assured me that God had led me to that Catholic university for many reasons.

As college continued it became more apparent why God wanted me to wait. During my junior year of college, I met one of the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist. She was visiting campus; I heard that one of their charisms was to provide marriage and family counseling. I began to develop a relationship with the community and, after a series of providential events, they invited me to spend the Triduum with them at the motherhouse in Connecticut.

When I arrived in Connecticut, I immediately felt at home. Since they are the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist, it was fitting that I arrived just in time to go straight to the chapel for the Good Friday service. There I heard in my heart, "My daughter, this is your new home. Welcome." My heart was filled with joy. I experienced dozens of

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Providential connections with the sisters over that blessed weekend. I could see how much they loved the Lord and I witnessed the joy they shared with each other. The attraction was so powerful. When I left that weekend, I said, "It's like they were made for me." I believe Our Lord chuckled, however, and reminded me it was the other way around.

We are all a work-in-process, but I really thought I needed more work before I could enter. So our Lord inspired me to request pre-postulancy, which is an initial discernment period for the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist. The community has asked me to resolve what I can before entering full-time. My student loans have always been a source of anxiety for me, and now it looked like they would block my vocation. But thanks be to God that I have found the Labouré Society. I am very grateful to be an aspirant in this wonderful organization.

Prayer & Invitation I invite you to join me in praying for my vocation and for my fellow Labouré aspirants. If you would like to learn more about how you can help us enter into formation, please email me at gretchen@laboureaspirant.org.

—Gretchen Geisheker

Why I'm writing

I am not only an aspirant to religious life; I am also a fundraiser for these vocations. A recent study confirmed that nearly 1 out of 2 aspirants have student loans and thus most communities and dioceses cannot accept them. 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 student loan amount of \$60,000 before June 30 for a Catholic non-profit that helps aspirants like me — The Labouré Society. Through Labouré, my fellow aspirants and I work together as a class raising donations from \$10 – \$10,000 to deliver each of us into formation. 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 sharing our stories, remembering us in prayer, and financially investing in our future.

At the end of our class, Labouré will issue awards based on individual effort and the funds available to Labouré. 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. Plus, every aspirant in Labouré has been accepted by their diocese or community and is required to work and liquidate their assets as able to make their own maximum loan payments.

At the beginning of our class, we met and participated in an intensive 3-day training on the ethics 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.

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!

LABOURÉ

Winter 2017 Class of Aspirants to the Priesthood and Religious Life



▶ Our vocations story videos are online at: www.LaboureSociety.org

About The Labouré Society

Why are we 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)

What have we accomplished?

- Operating since 2003
- Listed in the Official Catholic Directory
- Over 250 assisted into formation to the priesthood or religious life
- A network of thousands of praying bishops, priests, religious, families, and singles
- Over \$5 million awarded to aspirants for loan mitigation
- Labouré program support from bishops, superiors, and vocation directors nationwide

How do we do it?

Our Aspirants:

- Discern a vocation & are accepted into a diocese or religious institute*
 - Are blocked from entering or continuing vocational formation due to student loans
 - Apply to Labouré & meet intake requirements
 - Are trained in ethical fundraising – empowered with practical tools, personal mentoring, & accountability
 - Share their vocation stories and participate in building a culture of vocations and evangelization
 - Raise funds for Labouré to benefit many vocations
 - Are awarded monthly payments towards their education loans
 - Receive final award payout after 3 years & 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 the loan amount (loan consolidation, asset review, financial counseling, employment, etc.) prior to acceptance into the program
- Trains each aspirant in biblically based philanthropy
- Forms a semi-annual 'class' of aspirants
- 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

LABOURÉ
BRIDGE TO MIRACLES

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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 reallocated toward current or future aspirants.