

This is my Vocation Story



JAVIER RODRIGUEZ

How it Began My name is Francisco Javier Rodriguez and my friends call me Javier. I was born and raised in Manati, Puerto Rico and now live in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I'm the youngest of a family of four children. Since birth, I have been given the foundations of the Catholic faith. Throughout my early years, I attended our local parish with my family where I was raised with and surrounded by people with deep spiritual beliefs.

My Faith As a young child my parents and the parishioners around me were sowing the seeds of faith in me and my desire to be a priest began. As a young boy I "baptized" dolls for the First Communion students and even dreamed of becoming the first Puerto Rican Pope. Oh, those childhood dreams! I was so involved at an early age that I was an altar server before my First Communion. However, I couldn't say that this was my own faith; I was going through the motions. I enjoyed attending the Holy Mass and saying prayers, but I was just following the example of everyone around me.

All of that changed just before I turned eight years old. My sister and guardian angel became ill, and one month before she turned 18, the illness won while she was resting in the love and peace of God. I never heard the words "Mildred is dead." The person who sat down to give me the news just sat next to me and began to read from the Scriptures. From that point on everything changed. That was when I first realized God's grandeur and the foundation of faith around me.

*"I was so involved at an early age that I was an altar server before my First Communion."
—Javier Rodriguez*

My Vocation In his book "Jesuit Saturdays," Fr. William Byron mentions a vocation call is a gift of a mother's virtue. That was true for me and is where my vocation story begins.

Ever since she was pregnant with me, my mom desired and prayed for a religious life for me. With her heart set on that, I was baptized Francisco Javier, after the patron saint of missionaries. As I grew up, everything was leading me to

religious life. However, as I got into my teenage years, that dream began to fade and was overshadowed with thoughts of a good profession and a family of my own, despite the continued prayers of my mom and others.

Fast forward many years and a law degree later, God's call to serve Him as a priest returned in my heart. I prayed with deep reflection and discernment and with God's guiding hand, I experienced a newfound understanding of His unconditional love. He shared with me a clearer understanding of the Holy Trinity

Home:	Wisconsin
Community:	Midwest Capuchin Franciscans, Province of St. Joseph
Degree:	Journalism/Political Science
Alma Mater:	Ohio State University
Degree:	Doctorate in Law
Alma Mater:	New England Law
Occupation:	Benefits Specialist

Called to serve The Winter Class of 2017



and how each one of them acts in my life. I began to open my eyes to God's love and the path He desired for me. Several months later while reading a book, God's message really got through in several phrases and quotes which really resonated with me. The phrase "be true to yourself," was something I heard countless times before, but this time it had a different impact. As soon as I read it, the call was loud and clear; service through a religious life is the path for me to be true to myself. I was surprised at this to say the least. However, His call became even clearer the more I reflected on it. And just like that my call was renewed and my discernment truly began.

Called to Serve I feel God's call for me is to serve those who are marginalized by our society, sharing the gift of God's love with others through service. This allows me to be a living example of Jesus and brings me great joy. Professionally I've had the privilege to assist people who are indigent, have been convicted of a crime, or have a disability. With this call to serve, my discernment led me to the Capuchin Franciscans. Food pantries, soup kitchens, drug and alcohol rehab, and assistance to released convicted felons are just a few examples of how I will serve the Capuchin ministries. Watching and participating in those ministries has allowed me to find a home with the friars. St. Francis' example of unconditional love and service has helped me understand my own heart's desire and God's call for me. The Capuchins and I are eager for my entrance into formation, but the one obstacle of my student loans remains.

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desired for me."
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Prayer & Invitation Jesus told his disciples: "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest" (Lk. 10:2). With a great need for laborers in our world today, I invite you to pray for vocations. Your prayers are the seeds of laborers we sow and God harvests. I also ask for your continued prayers and support for my Labouré classmates and me as we continue our journey with God and you. I feel that our journey is not only mine but ours, as we, together in prayer and service, share in God's great unconditional love for each and every one of us. If you would like to learn more about my vocation and my fellow Labouré aspirants, please feel free to contact me at javier@laboureaspirant.org, and I'll be more than happy to share with you more of my path with God.

-Javier Rodriguez

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.