

This is my Vocation Story



JESSICA SCHIRA

How it Began Hi, my name is Jessica Schira. I was born and raised in the Dominican Republic and am 33 years old. I grew-up in a Catholic family and attended Catholic School where I received the sacraments. As a youth I consecrated my life to Jesus through Mary promising to imitate the virtues of The Blessed Mother.

Home: Pennsylvania
Community: Capuchin Poor Clares
Degree: Multimedia Journalism
Alma Mater: Herbert H Lehman College

Throughout my childhood I found the church to be a place of peace. I would often go even when the church was empty and contemplate the image of the sacred heart of Jesus behind the altar. There I gave Him my fears, worries or sadness. As I questioned and wrestled with these thoughts, I was often led to the Virgin Mary's peaceful acceptance of and obedience to God.

My Faith As I got older, life happened and I strayed away from the church. I had allowed the secular world to take control of my life. I had concentrated on achieving academic goals, making money and being independent. I felt abandoned by God but eventually came to realize that it was me who stood apart from Him. With this realization taking hold in my life, I felt a calling to be a nun and a peace came that turned every hardship into God strengthening and purifying my soul. I also realized that "Christ makes all things new." It is the joys and sufferings I lived through that have shaped who I am today... I am a sinner who understands that God is my priority and the rest will come at its given time.

My Vocation The attraction to religious life would come and go as I discerned my vocation. Should I be married and raise a family, or be a nun, or neither? I struggled while studying and working; stress built up. Yet there was a constant thought in my head "Do not worry." During this time I went to confession and the priest asked, "Have you ever considered religious life?" I had felt God's call, but said "No" at the time. I had the misconception that women who wanted to become nuns had to be completely holy, come from perfect, sinless Catholic backgrounds. The priest then asked, "What is your ultimate goal?" I said, "To be happy," to which he replied, "Then make Heaven your ultimate goal." That simple question had helped me to understand when I make Heaven my ultimate goal, I will be joyful and be happiest living a simple life with a pure heart.

My discernment began to deepen. I went on my first retreat laying everything before God asking for His forgiveness. This was an incredible experience for me. I felt the Lord's mercy and was inspired to forgive each person who had hurt me. Like the prayer of St. Francis says, "It is by forgiving that you are forgiven." I was forgiven and this liberated me. I took the next three years to discern and to make sure I

Called to serve The Winter Class of 2017



am following the Lord's plan and not my own. Attending vocational and silent retreats have helped me to hear God's call for my life and make it my own. Now when I hear the vocation stories of friars and nuns, they confirm that my path is clear.

Called to Serve I have been accepted as an aspirant to a Capuchin Poor Clares Community, which follows the spirituality and rules of Saint Clare of Assisi. I believe that my own charisms are of contemplation and communication and my desire is to put

these gifts in God's service to the church and the poor. A priest once told me "Jessica, evangelize in a way that you only use words when it is necessary." A fitting quote from St. Francis to a future Poor Clare.

The Poor Clares live the Gospel life in the spirit of poverty, humility, service, and joy. This community of loving, caring, helpful, and humble nuns makes me feel at home. Though I am a work in progress, I am excited to learn the spiritual way of life, work, prayers, schedules, and so much more. Their complete abandonment to the will of God has been my biggest challenge and my greatest lesson learned. I believe it is a beautiful sacrifice to concentrate my life on praying for others and helping the poor; to build friendships with God day by day listening to Him in the silence of the heart while interceding for others.

The community is excited about me entering the monastery, but I cannot join yet until I remove the student loan debt blocking my way. I believe that "God won't put in your heart something that is unrealizable" -Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. I believe that everything is possible with God.

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-Jessica Schira

Prayer & Invitation I invite you to pray with me and for me, and all of my fellow Labouré classmates, that God grant us the strength and faith to follow His will. Let us pray that more people can overcome the economic and family hardships of answering His call

and enter religious life. Together we can make a difference in today's world. Please contact me to find out how you can be a part of delivering more vocations to the Catholic Church at jessicas@laboureaspirant.org.

-Jessica Schira

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.