

This is my Vocation Story



MIKE HARP

How it Began Hello, my name is Mike Harp and I am 28 years old. I grew up an only child in a Catholic family. As a cradle Catholic I have always had faith in God. This and a strong sense of empathy was instilled in me by my mother who taught me to pray the Rosary and speak to Christ like a friend.

In contrast I was also exposed to secular culture and at times used my freedom for mischief. I lived a paradoxical life believing such things as, "It's OK, God loves me and understands." This was the spirituality of my youth, and it led me down some dark roads throughout high school and the first half of my college career.

My Faith Throughout my faith journey, I embarked on a pattern of ups and downs in which I would seek the Lord wholeheartedly after hitting rock bottom, but then backslide after He had lifted me out of trouble and brushed me off. Finally, I decided to change.

It was a slow process. Starting with Genesis, I began to read Scripture daily and after eight months had read the entire Bible. I accompanied these daily readings with Rosary mediation, frequent Confession, and walking to daily Mass. Sometimes during these walks, I would reflect on the second Joyful Mystery in which Mary visits Elizabeth: "The journey to Elizabeth's home is about eighty miles requiring four or five days travel. Though long and arduous, the journey is joyous, for Mary bears with her the Incarnate Word."

My spirit was still dark, but with each journey to Mass, I grew a little lighter. One day I noticed my heart was skipping and my chest began to feel like lava. It was as if every time I swallowed the Eucharist it was lodged inside me and became a flame. To this day it reignites in the measure that I surrender myself to my heavenly Father at Holy Mass, my daily fuel.

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My Vocation I have heard some who attend support groups say when they are feeling weak, "I have to get a meeting in." But with me it was, "I have to get a Mass in." It so happened that my coming to love the Eucharist coincided with my

coming to know Jesus personally. My relationship with the Eucharist and with God are synonymous. I feel I am as reliant on the Body and Blood of Christ as I am dependent on God for breath, and so to me the Eucharist means life. For Jesus at the first Mass said, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

Called to serve The Winter Class of 2017



I focused on getting to know God as 'Jesus,' and felt as if He were physically present, like someone I could reach out and touch in the room. I prayed for wisdom and began to see the world differently. My prior philosophies were turned upside down and God allowed me to see where I needed to improve in my life, for I was a great sinner. My girlfriend and I broke up and I no longer saw my fraternity brothers. I spent one month alone in my apartment, just my dog and me, praying and fasting. It was a desert experience that lasted through Lent, when I decided to return home. I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life.

Called to Serve I enrolled in the nearby Jesuit college where I studied theology, and God led me every step of the way. My mother had actually been praying for me for a long time; she thought I should major in theology. Through strangers I found a job and a spiritual director I would have for the next three years. It turns out this spiritual director was also the Vocation Director for my archdiocese at the time, and when I graduated we discussed my entering seminary. I had just finished making a Marian Consecration and it seemed that the Virgin Mary was nudging me in this direction.

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My family and I are thrilled that I am pursuing this vocation, and I have been blessed with great encouragement from my community. I never cease to be amazed at the way the Holy Spirit uses someone like me as His vessel in the lives of others, leading to conversions and graces I never thought possible.

Prayer & Invitation One hurdle I must overcome is my significant student loan debt. Although I have been accepted by my Archdiocese

to the seminary, I could not be ordained until this obstacle is removed so I am taking time to pay down the outstanding loans. I am working through The Labouré Society fund raising and working full-time. Your assistance during this time of my journey is appreciated beyond measure, and I will keep your prayers in my intentions.

I invite you to join me in prayer for all vocations in the Archdiocese of Mobile, AL and all over the world. Please know how much your support means to us, and if you would like to learn more about my vocation or those of my fellow Labouré aspirants, you can email mike@laboureaspirant.org. Thank you and God Bless You!

–Mike Harp

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.