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
• Over 1365 aspirants have been welcomed into Labouré
• Discern a vocation & are accepted into a diocese or religious institute*
• Labouré have completed award payout after three years active formation
• Mentors each aspirant to build a unified team; each individual works toward the collective goal
• Forms a semi-annual ‘class’ of aspirants
• 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
• Receives 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)

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
• Are helped to form a plan to become a priest or religious while they are in formation
• 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
• Hundreds of aspirants have been welcomed into Labouré

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
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This is my

Vocation Story

How it Began  
Hi, my name is Wil Bernhard. I grew up in a Catholic home with four siblings and was homeschooled through high school.

I converted to Catholicism with my family at the age of five, so while I have some early memories of life before the faith became a part of our family life, most of my memories are of our lives as Catholics. 

I was raised in the Roman Catholic faith and was solidly committed to pursuing a career in the Catholic Church.

The faith was a central part of my upbringing and my parents instilled in me a love for the Church. They inspired me to explore the faith in more depth, both in study and engagement in the liturgy.

My Faith

From the beginning I was blessed with a deep love for the Church and the liturgy; this was enhanced when I began serving at Holy Mass at the age of seven.

I even set up an altar in our house and put aside much time for the Lord and growing in my relationship with Him. It was not until college that a realization came to me about this missing element in my personal life. Through the inspiration of the local Dominican sisters and faith-filled friends, I was encouraged to engage in a spiritual life and grow closer to the Lord.

Over the last three years, the inner call to communion with the Lord in prayer, the daily desire for personal sacrifice, and the eagerness to serve others has increased. This calling was paramount in the decision to apply for the novitiate, where I pray God will allow me to persevere and serve Him as a Dominican friar.

Ever since I was young, I feel God has been calling me to be a priest. This has been a constant desire in my life. I have been called to be a priest. This has been a constant desire in my life.

My Vocation

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Wilhelm Bernard

What is my Vocation Story?
Called to serve
The Winter Class of 2017

Called to Serve
One principle I know will be part of life as a Dominican friar is related to their motto veritas. The contemplation and sharing of the truth is the foundational mission. The apostolates of the Eastern Province are rooted in this, from campus ministry, to retreats, and even to parish life. Some friars will pursue higher studies while others find their particular strength in giving spiritual direction to college students.

Being immersed in the Dominican tradition at a college run by Dominican sisters, I was privileged to be deeply involved in and brought to love the tradition and mission of the order. It is with gratitude I hear the Lord’s call to join the Dominicans. With God’s guidance I look forward to bring the sacraments to the faithful, evangelize those who do not yet know Jesus, and help to prepare the Church for the coming of the Bridegroom. I long to be a witness to the love and mercy of the Lord and believe it is the greatest thing any person can do. As a student I have pursued the truth in my studies, experiencing the excitement of finally starting to understand fundamental truths about man, God, and the relationship between them. I have begun to realize how these truths have practical implications in people’s lives, whether or not they realize it. I look forward to drawing others closer to Christ, however the Lord may call me, as a Dominican friar. I have been officially accepted by the provincial for the next novitiate class. Unfortunately, some student loan debt from college remains, and this will keep me from entering into the order, until it is completely resolved.

Prayer & Invitation
Please pray for me and all those discerning a call to the priesthood or religious life, that all of us will be able to put aside everything for the sake of the Lord. With your prayers I am sure that we will all attain our goal in God’s Holy Providence. Please contact me any time to learn more about my vocation and those of my fellow Labouré Society aspirants. You can reach me by email at wilhelm@laboureaspirant.org.

–Wilhelm Bernard

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.

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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Winter 2017 Class of Aspirants to the Priesthood and Religious Life

“With God’s guidance I look forward to bring the sacraments to the faithful, evangelize those who do not yet know Jesus, and help to prepare the Church...”

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Our vocations story videos are online at: www.LaboureSociety.org
Called to serve
The Winter Class of 2017

I was utterly shocked at the awe, joy and peace that welled up inside me in response to this proposal, “Lord, if this is really what you desire, yes!” Something I thought was impossible had just taken place: the Lord desired me as his spouse and I was joyful at the thought of it! Needless to say, I now had something to talk with sister about. Following that retreat I set a timeline of one year for discernment. I found a spiritual director and began spending more time with religious sisters.

The year of discernment was a complete gift from the Lord where He revealed not only who He is, but also who I am and how the deepest desires of my heart would truly be fulfilled in religious life. He showed me what I would be giving up by entering a convent, especially: my possessions, family life events, the freedom to travel, choosing how I spend my time, and even bearing and parenting my own children. There were moments of mourning for these things yet, at the same time, He revealed to me how my desires could not be fulfilled by the physical or tangible but instead only by the spiritual and heavenly. Instead of having my own children, I would be the spiritual mother to all, instead of doing my own will I would be free to do His, instead of owning my own possessions, He would provide me with all I would ever need. Even the thought of that was enough to bring me to tears because I could feel the deepest parts of myself longing for the eternal. I experienced Psalm 63: “O God, you are my God—it is you I seek! For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts.”

Called to Serve

Called to Serve

Called to Serve

After six months of discernment, my focus shifted from if I were called to where I am called to serve. Through my spiritual director, I encountered the Franciscan Sisters, TOR of Penance, of the Sorrowful Mother whose mission is to make known the merciful love of God. Their charisms are: crucified love, mercy, poverty, and contemplation. During my visits with the sisters, I saw these charisms in action through their ministry of performing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. As I worked and prayed alongside them I saw our Lord showing myself and felt Him saying, “Stay with me here” and “Come, I have prepared a place for you.” Almost one year to the date of the retreat where the Lord had initially proposed, I asked the Franciscan Sisters, TOR for an application. I applied and was accepted with the stipulation of being debt-free.

Prayer & Invitation

The Lord has provided for all of my needs so completely throughout my entire life that I have all confidence this final obstacle of my student loans are in His hands as well. It is with a deep joy and hope, with your help, I may enter the community of the Franciscan Sisters in August of 2017. As I work to do all I can to pay off my student loans, I invite you to ask the Lord how He is calling you to respond to the financial needs of myself and my fellow Labouré Society aspirants. I also ask you for your prayers as we prepare for our future vocations. Do not hesitate to contact me at: anne@laboureaspirant.org.

~Anne Goedtke

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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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- Completes award payout after three years active formation
- Trains each aspirant in biblically based philanthropy
- Mentors each aspirant to build a unified team; each individual works toward the collective goal
- Are trained in ethical fundraising – empowered with practical tools, personal mentoring, & accountability
- Are awarded monthly payments towards their education loans
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This is my Vocation Story

How it Began  Hello! I’m Anne Goedtke and looking back it is easy and incredible to see how the Lord’s hand has graciously guided my path. I grew up the second oldest of eight children on a devoutly Catholic family farm in southwestern Minnesota. Our life centered around our faith, spending time together, and playing music. Through attending daily mass, serving the church, and praying together as a family, God laid a sturdy foundation upon which my faith could grow.

My Faith  My faith began to take shape through summer camps with religious sisters, retreats, and encountering men and women who joyfully witnessed their personal relationship with God. Each time I attended something of this nature, I left desiring more, I was convinced that more existed, and was intent on persisting in prayer until I had experienced it myself. My spiritual enthusiasm waxed and waned throughout high school and freshman year of college. I continued to go through the motions of instilled Catholic habits, but something seemed to hold me back from experiencing the deep personal relationship with the Lord that so many people I looked up to seemed to enjoy.

During my sophomore year of college, the Lord showed me that I, myself, was the only thing holding me back from a full relationship with Him. In this moment I could see how, even though the Lord continued to provide for my needs, a core part of me had never trusted God to take care of me completely. I mistakenly believed the only person I could rely on was myself, and in doing so I have built a wall separating God from me. As I began allowing the Lord to break down that wall, I experienced a newfound closeness to Him I never knew existed. As a result the scriptures began to come alive, I desired to spend more time in adoration, and I started to attend daily mass.

My Vocation  Eventually the increased time I spent with God led to a Come and See with an order of women religious in Maine. As I continued to attend daily mass, the Lord has seen me through the ups and downs of discernment. I’ve come to know that the Lord is very faithful, and He only calls people in a way that He knows they can handle. I chose the Franciscan Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother because I was called to a life of poverty, worth, and service to the poor and near poor. I have been so grateful for the support I have received from the Sisters and the many prayer warriors. The Lord has continued to guide me along my path.

“My faith could grow.”

― Anne Goedtke

Occupation: Music Therapist
Alma Mater: University of Minnesota
Degree: Music Therapy
Community: Franciscan Sisters
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