

This is my Vocation Story



WIL BERNHARD

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. 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.

Home:	South Carolina
Community:	Dominican Friars of the Province of St. Joseph
Degree:	Philosophy
Alma Mater:	Aquinas College
Occupation:	Server

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 would take care of it throughout the liturgical year. In high school my social life became more central to me. While the faith remained important, actively engaging in it wasn't as much of my focus; I did not 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.”
—Wil Bernhard

My Vocation 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 even applied for seminary in my diocese during my senior year of high school, but did not complete the application when it seemed I was rushing the process. Instead, I applied for college and began studies as a lay student in philosophy and theology. With blessings from many of my friends, family, and God, my college years were primarily focused on forming healthy and solid relationships with others, developing disciplined habits as

a student, and growing in faith. I had come to know the Dominican Order in greater depth having visited the friars several times during my college years. The desire of priesthood increased with a sense of urgency and I knew it was time to pursue my vocation.

While spending time overseas, God blessed me with the gift of time and a quiet space for prayer and contemplation to discern the decision without any pressure from my own or other's expectations. It was there that I made the decision to apply to the Dominican Order.

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

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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.

—Wil Bernhard

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.