

# This is my Vocation Story



PATRICIA CLARK

**How it Began** I grew up in Indiana and Oklahoma, lived in Texas and Massachusetts, but in the end I returned to my home state of Michigan. I am the third of three children in a loving, Protestant, Christian family. Wherever we lived, we attended church on Sundays where I sang in the choir and was active in youth group. It was when I left for college that I drifted away from the church. After college, my career and social life were more of a priority than a relationship with God. But then God started pursuing me through friends at work. They helped me to see the beauty of the liturgy, at first of the Episcopal Church.

**Age:** 58  
**Home:** Michigan  
**Community:** Discalced Carmelites - Monastery of St. Therese  
**Degree:** Nursing  
**Alma Mater:** Baylor University, TX  
**Graduate Degree:** Nursing/Biobehavior  
**Graduate Alma Mater:** University of Michigan  
**Occupation:** Research Assistant

**My Faith** It was actually in my Anglo-Catholic Episcopal parish that I had my first serious thoughts about religious life. I wanted to give myself totally to God. I began to wonder why I was Anglo-Catholic instead of Roman Catholic? One night a friend, a new convert to the Catholic Church, invited me to Mass and challenged me to consider RCIA. When I walked into what is now my home parish, I was overwhelmed by the presence of the Lord. I signed up for RCIA the next day.

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*“While in prayer that afternoon He asked me if I would be willing to give Him everything... I said “yes” – although I was not exactly sure what “yes” really meant.”*  
–Patricia Clark

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**My Vocation** Easter Vigil in 2010 I was received fully into the Catholic Church. Daily Mass, the Rosary, regular time for prayer and reading scripture all became part of my regular routine. That fall at Mass while on a pilgrimage something extraordinary happened. God spoke to me in the depths of my heart asking me to spend time with Him in Adoration. If the Creator of the Universe wanted me to spend the afternoon with him, that was where I was going to be. While in prayer that afternoon He asked me if I would be willing to give Him everything. I remember kneeling in the back of that crowded chapel but it felt like I was the only one in the room. I said “yes” - although I was not exactly sure what that “yes” really meant.

About three months later, I stayed after Mass to pray and asked God to be specific about what He was asking of me. When I left the church, a woman followed and asked me if I had ever thought about being a Carmelite. I had been attracted to the Carmelite Saints since the beginning of my Catholic journey. It seemed that God had been showing me the way all along and He sent a complete stranger to invite me further down the path He had planned for me.

# Called to serve

## The Summer Class of 2016



Beginning formation as a Secular Carmelite at a local Catholic Church, the thought of religious life persisted, but I was concerned that I was too old. Stories of women who entered religious life in their 40s and 50s kept surfacing and then on the radio I heard a religious sister say that one was never too old if it was God's will. I went on a diocesan discernment retreat and the Carmelite sisters were there — for the first time ever! I met the Prioress and Novice Mistress and was able to ask that important question — was I too old? The Prioress smiled and said that God had often worked through older

women and reminded me of St. Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. It was my turn to smile; Elizabeth was my confirmation saint.

**Called to Serve** The charism of the Discalced Carmelites is contemplative prayer. The focus is on God alone — which is simple and at the same time intensely powerful. Prayer was the first attraction for me in the Catholic Church — whether vocal prayer, the Rosary, or time in Adoration. The Discalced Carmelites take Mary as their model — they hold God's people and their needs in their hearts in prayer. This is lived out in a balance of community prayer, two hours of private contemplative prayer daily, the work of keeping up the Monastery, and by studying the Word of God and the works of the Carmelite saints. Although the sisters never leave the cloister, they serve the very poor and the rich, the greatest of sinners and the pillars of the Church, heads of state and prisoners

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*—Patricia Clark*

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on death row. They do this in the heart of the Church — behind the walls of the cloister and in silence — by praying for the world. I was privileged to live with the sisters for a month last winter. I experienced first-hand rising before dawn in the cold to pray first in community and then alone in my cell, working in silence, the laughter at recreation and the majesty of singing the Solemn Salve on Saturday night. I cannot imagine a greater blessing than to become a part of this community.

Five years after giving everything to God I received notification that I had been accepted as a postulant. I am thrilled to think that one day I might wear the habit of the Discalced Carmelites and pray and work with the Sisters at the Monastery of St. Therese. Though before I can enter into formation I must overcome the obstacle of student debt. It is difficult to remain "outside the grate" having experienced life in the cloister.

**Prayer and Invitation** I invite you to pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. I also invite you to prayerfully consider supporting me and my fellow Labouré aspirants so that we can overcome the final obstacle of student debt and begin to serve the Lord as He has called us.

If you would like more information, or have any questions, please contact me at [patricia@laboureaspirant.org](mailto:patricia@laboureaspirant.org).

—Patricia Clark

## 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 one out of two 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.

*As a class of 16, we're working to raise \$960,000 before December 31 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 three-day training session 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!

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# LABOURÉ

*Summer 2016 Class of Aspirants to the Priesthood and Religious Life*



Our vocations story videos are online at: [www.LaboureSociety.org](http://www.LaboureSociety.org)

# About The Labouré Society

## Why are we needed?

- There are an estimated 10,000 individuals discerning a vocation to the priesthood or religious life 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 240 assisted into formation to the priesthood or religious life
- A network of thousands of praying bishops, priests, religious, families, and singles
- Over \$4.3 million awarded. 100% of gifts go toward aspirants; 90% goes to the current class for loan mitigation and 10% is a tithe to the next aspirant class to subsidize their training expenses

## How do we do it?

### *Our Aspirants*

- Discern a vocation and are accepted into a diocese or religious community
- Are blocked from entering or continuing vocational formation due to student loans
- Apply to Labouré and meet intake requirements
- Are trained in ethical fundraising – empowered with practical tools, personal mentoring, and 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 toward their education loans
- Receive final award payout after three years and enter freely into a lifetime of service as a priest, sister, or brother

### *The Labouré Society*

- Works with each aspirant to ensure all personal means are utilized 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 multiple classes of aspirants annually
- Mentors each aspirant to build a unified team; each individual works toward the collective goal
- Provides ongoing accountability to ensure proper preparation and completion of personal fundraising plans
- Equips each aspirant with an online fundraising platform for real-time donation processing, reporting, assessment of goals and class interaction, marketing and communications
- Facilitates ongoing communication and updates between aspirants and donors after formation entrance
- Manages aspirant award payments while they are in formation
- Completes award payout after 3 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.*