

This is my Vocation Story



SCOTT BAHRKE

In the Beginning I was born in Watertown, Wisconsin on July 24, 1967, the first child of my parents (or, “Angel Number One” as my grandmother called me). I was baptized as an infant and raised Catholic. According to the notes in the baby book that my mother kept, I said my first prayer alone at 26 months: *God bless momma and daddy; grandma and grandpa; Shane, Sassy and McDonald [our pets]; Jill [my sister]; all my friends; all my toys; and me. Amen.*

Age:	49
Home:	Tennessee
Diocese:	Diocese of Memphis
Degree:	East Asian Studies
Alma Mater:	Washington & Lee University
Occupation:	Seminarian

My first memories of spiritual life came from my grandmother. She had a profound influence on me as a young child since my two sisters and I spent quite a bit of time with her. The one word that comes to mind when I think about her is *saintly*. She loved us with a giant heart and freely spent what little money she had on us. Her radiant smile and light-hearted demeanor assured us that all was well. She kept a beautiful flower garden both indoors and outdoors, and she taught us – literally – to stop and smell the roses and to admire the colors, shapes, and smells of God’s creation. She developed in me a sense of wonder of the world which remains to this day.

My Faith Journey One of the most powerful moments in my faith life came to me while I was serving as an Army officer in Iraq during the first Gulf War. For months I lived in the middle of the barren desert, and the nights were pitch black. In what I came to call my conversations with Orion, since that constellation was prominent at that time in the night sky, I sat on the sand berm outside my tent every evening staring up at the sky and contemplating the “big questions.”

*“There is so much need in this world,
and so few people to do the work.”*

—Scott Bahrke

While staring up at the Milky Way and the uncountable number of stars and considering the sheer immensity of the universe, God became powerfully real. I felt very close to God during this time, and I gained many valuable insights during my reflections. One of those insights was the acceptance with complete certainty in the existence of God, in Jesus Christ His son, and in the Church that Christ founded. This was no small thing. At times when my faith was not as strong, this certainty would always remain as a lighthouse in the stormy seas of my life. It drew me back whenever I wandered and was lost. Although I did not feel it at the time, I came to be thankful for my time in the desert, and I understood why Jesus chose to spend forty days in the desert Himself. By stripping away all the distractions of life, I was able to focus on the important things that matter.

My Vocation I credit my vocation first to my parents who sacrificed so much so that my sisters and I might attend Catholic schools. At Catholic school we regularly attended daily Mass and I had the opportunity to be an altar server.

Called to serve

Fall 2016 Class of Aspirants



I remember how excited I was every time my name appeared on the schedule because it meant the opportunity to serve God in a much more substantial way. I looked with great admiration at priests and announced with the innocent certainty of a child to everyone who would listen, my ambition to be a priest when I grew up. My sisters recently reminded me that we used to play Church when we were very young, and I would “celebrate Mass” using Oscar Mayer bologna and Welch’s grape juice as the bread and wine.

As I grew, however, life intervened and I pursued other priorities. Through it all, though, God’s quiet whisper remained ever in the background. For a long time I felt as if I were doing God’s will by attending Church regularly, praying consistently, and doing volunteer work occasionally. I naively assumed that there were enough religious to take care of the spiritual needs of God’s people.

Over the last several years, though, God’s quiet whisper became increasingly more insistent. Through prayer, the counsel of my pastors and spiritual directors, and fellowship with good Catholic men and women, I came to understand that it was time to set aside my career for something infinitely more important: the spiritual well-being of God’s people. There is so much need in this world and so few people to do the work. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Luke 10:2).

Called to Serve I moved to Memphis, Tennessee just over four years ago and very quickly came to believe there is something very special about the Catholic Diocese of Memphis. Often called the “buckle of the Bible Belt,” Memphis is full of Christian churches. Catholics comprise under 5% of the population here and yet have an amazing impact on the community. For example, on November 1, 2014, we hosted the Magnificat Day of Joy with the Magnificat Foundation, only the third city to have done so. The event was an extraordinary celebration of the splendor of the Catholic faith. It was covered live by EWTN and reached 140 countries and several million viewers. The day ended with a Eucharistic procession down Main Street in downtown Memphis headed by our bishop, followed by adoration in a city park.

I want to be a priest for the Diocese of Memphis in order to serve as the vessel through which the Holy Spirit will work to save souls. The siren call of our secular society is powerful and alluring. I’m excited to use all the gifts God has given me to serve as His advocate. I look forward to spending my remaining years loving and serving His people here in Memphis by witnessing their marriages, baptizing their children, educating them in their faith, offering viaticum to the sick, burying their dead, celebrating their happy events and comforting them through the difficult periods. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, I hope to lead an army of faithful to the gates of Heaven.

The Catholic Diocese of Memphis has accepted my application and I will be starting seminary shortly. I am incredibly excited about entering seminary, but I face a tremendous obstacle – my remaining student loan debt. I cannot be ordained until that debt is resolved and that obstacle causes anxiety. Ultimately, however, I trust completely that God will provide.

Prayer and Invitation I humbly ask for your prayers for my brother seminarians and for myself. I ask also for you to join me on the road as we journey together toward our Lord, Jesus Christ. If you would like to learn more about how you might help, please feel free to contact me at scott@laboureaspirant.org

–Scott Bahrke

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.

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!

LABOURÉ

Fall 2016 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 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 \$5 million awarded to aspirants for student loan debt mitigation
- Labouré program support from bishops, superiors, and vocation directors nationwide

How do we do it?

Our Aspirants

- Discern a vocation and are accepted into a diocese or religious institute*
 - Are blocked from entering or continuing vocational formation due to education 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 institute must be listed in the Official Catholic Directory)

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, marketing and communications, assessment of goals, and class interaction
- 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.