



ARCHDIOCESE OF OKLAHOMA CITY  
OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

March 1, 2017

*Ash Wednesday*

Dear Brother Priests,

When the prophet Samuel was a young boy, he heard a voice in the darkness calling his name, “Samuel! Samuel!” It was the Lord calling him, but he did not know it was the Lord until the High Priest Eli invited him to respond to the voice by saying, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!” In this passage we see that God calls ordinary people to do extraordinary things by being attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and responding with faithful and loving hearts.

God is still calling faithful hearts to serve Him in the priesthood and consecrated life. Unfortunately, some will not be able to enter into priestly or religious formation because they have significant student loan debt. As we continue to encourage our young people to prayerfully discern God’s vocation in their life, we cannot ignore such a serious obstacle as this.

The Labouré Society was established in 2003, in order to assist those who had been accepted into formation programs with a diocese or a religious community, but have large student loan debt. So far, The Labouré Society has assisted 273 individuals with nearly \$4 million in financial awards. This program has broken down barriers that would otherwise have ended the vocational journey for many young men and women.

In February 2017, I met with Ashley Parmer, a graduate of St. Gregory’s University in Shawnee. She has heard the Lord call her to prayerfully discern a vocation to the religious life. However, when she approached the contemplative Benedictine Sisters of St. Walburga Abbey, she discovered that she would not be allowed to enter into formation until she had paid off her student loans. Unfortunately, Ashley is not alone.

There are nearly 5,000 men and women unable to enter into priestly or religious formation because of student loan debt. Ashley and her fellow “aspirants” in the Labouré Society have student loan debt that averages \$45,000. Since Ashley is the first person from the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City to have been accepted as an aspirant, her need offers an opportunity for us to support her with our prayers and to assist her in making connections with individuals throughout our community to become Labouré investors.

Not only can we help her raise money to enter into religious formation, but she can also personally encourage young men and women to follow the example of Samuel, who

*Go Make Disciples*

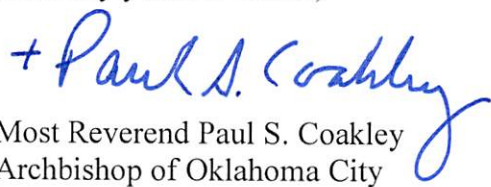
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responded to the Lord with joy. I encourage pastors throughout the Archdiocese to consider welcoming Ashley to speak at parish events or even following weekend Masses in order to share the mission of the Labouré Society with the faithful and to encourage the wider community to be open to God's providential call in each of our lives.

With the assurance of my prayers and best wishes for a fruitful Lenten season, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Paul S. Coakley

Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley  
Archbishop of Oklahoma City