

This is my Vocation Story



Chris Dixon

In the Beginning Greetings, my name is Chris Dixon. I was born in Winona, Texas, but most of my school years were spent in DeSoto Parish, Louisiana. I have one sister, two step-sisters, and two step-brothers. We grew up in a Protestant family. My mother tells me that I was dedicated to Christ as a baby even though that was not the family tradition. When asked why, she responded, "We wanted to make certain that Christ had an influence on your life early on." We attended church regularly and were very involved. We loved the fellowship of the Christian family and hearing and learning the word of God.

My Faith During a church revival in 1997, I found Christ as my savior and was baptized. It was my first extraordinary experience with Christ. I couldn't wait to have my sins washed away and know that my soul was saved. This lit a fire within me and I was anxious to share the good news of Christ. As I grew in my faith, I was asked to teach Bible studies and lead others in their faith. It was an amazing experience that I still carry with me today. Seeing the love of Jesus in the eyes of others as they discover His love for them is amazing.

On Christmas Eve a co-worker invited me to join them at midnight Mass. At the time I knew very little about the Catholic Church, however, something urged me to tag along. I was surprised to find the church was packed. Many of the Christmas hymns were familiar and I found myself comfortable there. As the Mass began, the sounds of instruments, the smell of the incense, and the presence of the Holy Spirit came

*"I wanted to learn as much as I could about the Catholic Faith."
—Chris Dixon*

over me like it had at my baptism. The priest held the host and chalice and began to chant. Chills ran down my back as the congregation responded in singing "Amen." I was in shock and somewhat confused as I didn't understand what was going on. I was, however, certain Jesus's presence was among all of us.

After this experience I had many questions. I wanted to learn as much as I could about the Catholic faith. I did some personal soul searching and reflection before agreeing to join the RCIA class. I still didn't know that I believed everything that I had read about the Catholic Church, but felt that I needed to know more. The next six months flew by! I looked forward to my evenings with the RCIA team. We built a small family during that time of spiritual growth. It was during the RCIA process that I first experienced God's call in my life to a new vocation. A seminarian, who was in this same RCIA class a few years back, shared his story and spoke about the priesthood. I felt a small tug at my heart then. I answered quickly back with, "No way!" I knew my past; there was no way God wanted me to work for him. In April of 2015 I was welcomed into the Church and came to understand the Church's teachings.

During the next year, I devoted myself to spending at least an hour each week in adoration. I thought it would be difficult, but before long, I was staying over my hour. I looked forward to my time with the

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Called to serve The Summer Class of 2018



Blessed Sacrament. One evening at adoration, I again heard God's invitation to serve him. I decided to contact the vocation director of the diocese.

My Vocation After talking with the vocation director, we agreed that I should wait another year to see if the call continued in my life. I immersed myself in the Church. Nothing has brought me greater joy than serving God's people. While at church, I was invited to attend a men's retreat. I had never been on a retreat and I didn't know why God called me to it, but He had something He wanted to tell me. Like the story of Mary and Martha from the Bible, I had become like Martha. I was doing work for the Church and living a decent Catholic life; however, I wasn't listening. This retreat offered me the opportunity to get away from the "noise" of daily life. I encountered Christ in a brand new way. On the last afternoon of the retreat, while kneeling in prayer, I heard the comforting words of Jesus. The words were simple. I clearly heard Jesus ask me, "Chris, do you love Me?" When I heard these words, I recounted the bible story of Jesus asking these words to Peter and I immediately began to cry as God's presence was so strong. I replied, "You know that I love you Lord," and continued my prayers. This happened two additional times. I was so overcome by the Holy Spirit. I found that this was confirmation of my belief that I was being called into the ministry of the Church and hopefully a priestly vocation. As I left my room that afternoon, a member of the retreat team approached me. After talking a while he asked me, "Chris, have you considered being a priest?" Again, I was overcome with emotion and shared my experience with him. Upon arrival back home, I

reached out again to the vocation director to discuss where God may be leading me.

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Called to Serve My vocation director felt the Holy Spirit leading him to give me an application. After looking at the many parts of the application, I questioned if this was what God was really asking me to do. My pastor encouraged me to stay active in the Church and listen. I found peace in working with the poor and praying for those who would

ask for prayer before or after Mass. I joined the RCIA team and was asked to serve on the pastoral council. I felt called to complete the application and see what God had planned for me. My prayer continues to be that God's will be fulfilled in my life. Each morning my prayer is "Here I am Lord, what should we accomplish today?"

As I've shadowed my pastor over the years, I've become more amazed at the gift and sacrifice of the priesthood. I'm excited about the opportunities to gain a broader understanding of the Catholic Church and opening my heart, mind, and soul to priestly formation. I'm also thankful to God for allowing me to walk and discover this journey with Him. While the Diocese of Shreveport has expressed plans to accept me into their formation program, they have requested that I eliminate my student loan debt first. While this obstacle is lengthening my time to enter formation, I know that God will continue to use me each day until He is ready for me to take the next steps. He remains larger than any obstacle any of us may face and He certainly has plans for this student loan debt.

Prayer & Invitation I invite you to join me in prayer for all who are blocked from their vocations due to student loan debt. Your prayers and support help us to continue to strive and serve the Universal Church in hopes of one day committing our lives to the Church. To hear more about my journey, please feel free to reach out to me at chrisd@laboureaspirant.org. Thank you for your time, prayers and support. May God continue to bless each of us as we strive to fulfill His will for our lives.

-Chris Dixon

Why I'm Writing

I am not only an aspirant to religious life; I am also a fundraiser for a class of aspirants pursuing the priesthood or religious life. A recent study confirmed that nearly 1 out of 2 aspirants have student loans debt which prevents them from entering their seminaries and religious communities. 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 aspirant student loan amount of \$60,000 before December 31st for The Labouré Society, a Catholic non-profit that helps aspirants like me. Every aspirant has been accepted by their diocese or community and is required to work and liquidate their assets as to be able to make their own maximum loan payments. Through Labouré, my fellow aspirants and I work together as a class raising donations which will be divided amongst the class and ultimately applied to our remaining student loans. 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 financially investing in our future and the future of the church.

At the beginning of our class, we met and participated in an intensive 3-day training on the ethics, practice, 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.

At the end of our class, Labouré will issue awards to each aspirant based on individual effort and the total funds raised. 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.

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

Summer 2018 Class of Aspirants to the Priesthood and Religious Life



Our vocations story videos are online at: www.RescueVocations.org

About The Labouré Society

Why is our Rescue Mission 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)

How does our Rescue Mission work?

Our Aspirants:

- Discern a vocation and are accepted into a diocese or religious institute*
 - Are blocked from entering or continuing vocational formation due to student loans
 - Apply to Labouré and meet intake requirements
 - Are trained in Catholic based fundraising and provided practical tools, personal mentoring, & accountability
 - Share their vocation stories with hundreds of donors thereby building a culture of vocations and evangelization
 - Raise funds for Labouré collectively as a class of multiple aspirants
 - Receive monetary awards from the funds raised by the class
 - Have minimum monthly award payments made to their student loan agencies over 36 months of active formation.
 - Receive final award payout after 3 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 aspirants to utilize all personal means to mitigate their loan amount (loan consolidation, asset review, financial counseling, employment, etc.) prior to acceptance into the program
- Trains each aspirant in Catholic based philanthropy
- Forms a semi-annual 'class' of aspirants that raises funds collectively for all members of the class
- 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

What has the Labouré Rescue Mission accomplished?

- Operating since 2003
- Listed in the Official Catholic Directory
- 280+ assisted into formation to the priesthood or religious life
- A network of thousands of praying bishops, priests, religious, families, and singles
- Over \$6 million awarded to aspirants for loan mitigation
- Labouré program support from bishops, superiors, and vocation directors nationwide

LABOURÉ
HELP RESCUE VOCATIONS

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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 made available to other Labouré needs.