

This is my Vocation Story



Jeff Pooley

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In the Beginning Hi, my name is Jeff Pooley and I was born and raised in Riverside, CA. I am the middle of three children and grew up in a typical middle-class Catholic family. Much of our life was parish based. We attended Catholic school, mass on Sundays, and engaged in other parish activities. My grandparents played a huge part in who I am today. My grandpa, who was legally blind for most of my life, was the care taker for all eleven of us grandchildren. He truly pushed us to be the best we could be. God undoubtedly blessed me in my youth; a truth that I wouldn't see until much later.

My Faith Growing up, my faith was very much "cultural." I knew we were Catholic and that it was important, but I couldn't tell you why. It was there, it was real, but it had no depth.

Freshman year of college, while off by myself for the first time, things began to change. This is the time in many peoples' lives when they reject the faith in some way and become rebellious. I wasn't much different. I started skipping Mass, for no reason other than laziness, yet I still called myself a nice Catholic guy. I would defend the Church Monday through Saturday and then reject her on Sunday. I then looked at myself and saw the hypocrite that I was. How could I tell anyone else that the Church was right about anything if I wasn't living it out in my own life? I started studying the faith and attending Mass in order to see what we really believed.

"Through priests and the sacraments, God opened for me a deeper world in the life of the Church."

—Jeff Pooley

I started delving into as many Catholic things as I could because I had developed a great desire to grow in the faith. I looked for places to interact with other Catholics my age, but unfortunately there was nothing within 100 miles except youth ministry. I remember saying to God in frustration, "No! I don't want to serve. I want to be served!" I was shaken by my own words. I realized that God was leading me where I had not wanted to go, but where He wanted me to go.

I started serving in youth ministry, which I did for the next three years. God used this time to bestow so many graces on me. Through priests and the sacraments, God opened for me a deeper world in the life of the Church.

My Vocation I've always been amazed by the extravagant and 'big' vocation stories of others, because my story sounds nothing like that. Mine is the story of a patient God who nudges a stubborn mule along. The first nudge came at a young age. I remember being drawn to the Eucharist. I was excited for my first communion and I remember thinking that I wanted to receive the Eucharist always. As an altar server, I can remember being in awe of the priest and of what he was doing. Then little league and relationships came into the picture and the story might have seemed to end there, but God is faithful. I was weeks from graduating high school when the religious order who had run our parish since I was in the second grade

Called to serve

The Summer Class of 2018



prepared to go back to Spain. One of the older Spanish priests was retiring, but what they had not told us was that he actually had cancer and was going home to die near his family. I couldn't even recall a single word he had ever said, yet I sat in a pew and cried for this man. His witness of going to a foreign land to lay down his life for his people had impacted my life. I remember just hearing God whisper to my heart "I could be calling you to lay down your life the same way." I was in shock. I had a plan for my life. I was going off to school. I was going to make money and have a family.

Four years later I was living with my friend who was discerning a religious vocation. Everyone kept saying we both should become priests. He was already saying yes and I was saying no. I told myself that I was too deep into my career. I felt that there was no turning back. While pursuing multiple new career paths, God continued to be faithful. He put many holy people, especially priests, in my life. I continued to grow in the faith again and ended up back in my home town where a group of Dominican friars served. I started meeting with a priest who truly loves like Jesus and I became attracted to the priesthood yet again. Unfortunately, I felt that no one would consider me because of my debt. So I pushed forward in my career trying to ignore the call, but it was all I could think about. One day I decided I had to reach out to the vocation director of Phoenix. I knew in the blink of an eye that I couldn't hide this desire anymore. God had been lovingly calling me for so long. I felt God was calling me by name for Himself and for His Church. How could I resist a second longer!

*"I felt God was calling me by name
for Himself and for His Church."*

-Jeff Pooley

Called to Serve The Church has always talked about how the faith is really passed on in the domestic Church, the home. This is one of the things that draws me to the diocese of Phoenix. The diocese, under the leadership of our bishop, has been a leading force in revitalizing this truth! One of the ways is through the apostolic exhortation "Into the Breach" where the bishop calls upon men to lead the battle against sin and evil. She continues to grow multi-generational male fraternity

among grandfathers, fathers and sons through her men's conference, that sells out every year. The apostolate Life Teen International, was founded in the diocese of Phoenix, and continues to make its mark on the world. All of this is possible because men in every generation have said yes to the call of Christ to cast into the deep. Men who have inspired me to be a better man!

Jesus says in Luke's gospel: "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!" This is my current prayer, I have been called I have been accepted by the Diocese of Phoenix and I am ready to go. Yet I'm stuck. Can you imagine feeling called to something as important as this, yet you are unable to move forward because of a financial obstacle? I think, if not for this financial burden, I might have entered five years ago. Thank God for the work of The Labouré Society and the body of the Church! God willing, my entrance date will not be blocked much longer with your help through the work of Labouré.

Prayer & Invitation I believe there are many young people who feel a call from God to a vocation, but for whatever reason do not pursue it. Please, I beg you, pray for vocations. We desperately need the next generation of holy men and women to carry the Church into the future. All the holy saints we think of in the past were made saints because of people like you who prayed and supported them. If you would like to learn more about my story and ways that you can help, please contact me at: jeffreyp@laboureaspirant.org.

-Jeff Pooley

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.