

This is my Vocation Story



Maria Aldape

In the Beginning Hello, my name is Maria Aldape. I am originally from Eagle Pass, TX, where I grew up in a loving Catholic family and the youngest of four children. From childhood God has always been an essential part of my life. I remember gathering with family at my grandma's house to pray the rosary in front of her homemade altar. I served in various roles and ministries within the parish, such as being an altar server, choir member, youth group member, and catechism aide. My family was also involved in different ministries and within time, St. Joseph's Church became our second home. One of my favorite ways to serve as a child was at Mass. I was an altar server from elementary up to high school and it all started with an invitation from my parish priest. I was very shy as a child and would just giggle when he asked, but I never said no to the idea. Finally, one day after Mass he asked me again, and I finally had the courage to say "Yes!" My priest started jumping and announcing the news to those around him. That day my face was the reddest it had ever been, but my heart was filled with so much peace and happiness. I was ready to serve God. Now I see a parallel in my life today when discerning my religious vocation.

Home: Texas
Community: Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity (SOLT)
Degree: Public Health Epidemiology
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My Faith "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."-Jeremiah 29:11. I had my whole life planned out for me, I was going to become a heart surgeon, get married, have children, and serve in the Catholic Church with my

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-Maria Aldape*

"future" family. Now I laugh as I reflect back and see how I thought I knew it all. It was on my first teen retreat where I had an intimate encounter with our Lord. With a combination of the inspirational people, testimonies, prayer, and activities, I saw everything through a different lens. I felt the fire of the Holy Spirit and I no longer was just going through the motions but was ready to conquer the world. I gained a stronger passion for service and found that God was calling

me to serve and advocate for the most vulnerable; those without a home, the unborn, the elderly, refugees, the hungry, the sick. I was no longer trying to do my will but the will of God. As soon as I surrendered to Him, I felt as if a heavy load was taken off my chest. God surprised me with beautiful adventures and I realized God had much greater plans for me, more than I could have ever imagined.

My Vocation "To fall in love with God is the greatest romance; to seek Him the greatest adventure; to find Him, the greatest human achievement."-St. Augustine of Hippo. I attended the University of Texas at San Antonio and participated in ministries which gave me the opportunity to serve and love others. I began discerning my religious vocation during my senior year of college. While attending my first discernment retreat, I felt my heart satisfied and filled with enormous joy. I realized that God wanted me to explore this vocational path further. I felt drawn to this life. I could see myself living as a religious; giving my life

Called to serve The Summer Class of 2018



to Jesus and loving all His children through this vocation. Jesus lovingly pursued me, took me by the hand, and led me to a new journey - a deeper relationship with Him. Throughout my discernment journey, I've encountered many obstacles and feelings of uncertainty, but in those moments Jesus held me tighter to ensure I felt His presence and perfect love. I found myself longing to spend more alone time with Jesus. It was the only thing that filled the thirst in my heart. Throughout this time God gave me confirmations that all pointed to religious life. Despite having all these signs, I ran to

Mother Mary in adoration for advice and asked her to tell me what to do. Within my prayer, she responded, "Do whatever He tells you." I was in awe, such a simple phrase had an everlasting impact within me. I finally let go and let God; I let go of all the doubts and rested my head in the most sacred heart of Jesus and from there on promised to always "do whatever He told me." He continued to guide me throughout my discernment and lovingly tug my heart. As the gentleman that He is, He patiently waited for me as a groom waits for his bride. Then when I was ready, I joyfully accepted His invitation to follow Him. With deep prayer, God's guidance, and the support of my family and spiritual directors, I felt God call me to the vocation of religious life. I fell in love with the man who died for me. I fell in love with Jesus.

Called to Serve "Then, overcome with joy, I cried, 'Jesus, my love. At last I have found my vocation. My vocation is love...'" – St. Thérèse de Lisieux. During my visits with the order, Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy

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Trinity (SOLT), I have always felt enormous love and have enjoyed participating and learning about their many ministries and beautiful prayer life. I constantly asked for God to be my guide and would repeat to Him, "I'll serve wherever I am needed, Lord." As I got to know SOLT, I pictured myself loving and serving others through each ministry such as working with migrant farm workers, providing retreats, healthcare, serving in orphanages, and evangelizing. Their

charism is to be disciples of Jesus through Mary living in Marian-Trinitarian communion serving in ecclesial family teams in areas of deepest apostolic need. I felt like that was a confirmation from God. SOLT went wherever they were needed, where the deepest apostolic need was. I fell in love with their Marian-Trinitarian spirituality and their ecclesial family teams. I always admired Our Lady, her perfect fiat, and her precious relationship with the Most Holy Trinity. She is my role model and I could feel her motherly love through everyone I encountered in the SOLT ecclesial family teams. It is a loving family of all vocations striving for the same mission within 12 different countries around the world. The more I learned and spent time with them, the more I felt at home. An enormous peace filled my heart and at that moment I knew I had found my home in a community. I am happy to share that I have been formally accepted to this community! I am so excited to start formation; however, my student loan debt is the one obstacle I must overcome before I can enter. God has led me to this point and I have faith He will continue to provide.

Prayer & Invitation I ask for your prayers for my Labouré classmates and me throughout this journey, as well as all aspirants who have financial obstacles preventing them from fulfilling their desire to enter religious life. May all of God's children have open hearts to see His will for their lives, have the courage to say "Yes," and take that leap of faith. Know that you will be in my prayers. If you would like to know more about my journey or how you may support my vocation, please contact me at mariaa@laboureaspirant.org. Thank you and may God bless you always!

-Maria I. Aldape

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.