

This is my Vocation Story

In the Beginning: Hi, my name is Gretchen Erlichman. I am originally from Utica, New York, where I grew up as the second-oldest of four girls in a loving, Catholic family. Growing up, my childhood was shaped by my Catholic faith. My Nanna and Grandpa especially helped to cultivate a family environment that was steeped in strong moral values. Also, my parents decided to homeschool my three sisters and me, which allowed us to live out our faith in every aspect of our daily lives. From attending daily Mass and saying the Rosary as a family, to singing in the church choir and playing the organ, to volunteering at parish feast-day celebrations, our lives were filled with the fruits and joys of our Catholic faith.



"I felt that, although I was doing everything I had planned for myself, I was constantly searching for something more."

My Faith: "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the decision of the Lord that endures." -Proverbs 19:21. Although the deep-rooted seeds of faith that were cultivated during childhood remained planted within my heart, there came a time when my own plans began to push my faith to the margins of my busy life. I had everything all planned out - I was going to get a degree in music and perform on stages all over the world, then I would further my studies and get a PhD in musicology, which would eventually lead me to settle down and have a family while working as a college professor. Seems perfect, right? Well, in order to achieve all of these things, a person has to let some things take precedence, while other things fall away. Unfortunately, for me, the amount of time that I dedicated to my spiritual life began to diminish; attending Mass became an activity that was reserved for an hour on Sundays and holy days. Prayer and the Sacraments, which had been an essential part of my daily life, became a mere duty to be fulfilled. Thus, my days became

filled with practicing, rehearsals, studying, and social events, which allowed me to begin to accomplish the goals I had set for myself. Yet, despite getting my degrees, singing internationally, making great friends, and having incredible life experiences, something was missing. I felt that, although I was doing everything I had planned for myself, I was constantly searching for something more. I was searching for the good, the true, and the beautiful, but little did I realize that it could only be found in God's plan, not my plan. I realized that I was singing my own song; I was singing the tune of my own goals and accomplishments, but the melody had fallen flat. It was then that I began to realize that my happiness lay in the wise words of St. Augustine: "Sing with your voices, your hearts, your lips and your lives: Sing to the LORD a new song."



Gretchen Erlichman

Community:	Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist
Alma Mater:	Westminster Choir College Nazareth College of Rochester
Degree:	Voice Performance, Pedagogy
Home:	New York
Phone:	(315) 941-7340
Email:	gretchen@rescue vocations.org
To Donate:	rescue vocations.org/gretchen



My Vocation: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” -Luke 1:38. As I began to turn my voice, heart, lips, and life toward singing the praises of the Lord, I was filled with the indescribable and overwhelming love and joy of Christ. I desired to attempt to give Him as much love as He had showered me with in gifting me the mercy and grace to come back into His loving embrace. I once again began to pray regularly and attend daily Mass and Adoration, and I became involved with groups of young Catholics all seeking to live lives defined by their faith. In doing so, I began to experience such peace and happiness, and, in the perfection of Christ, I started to discover the goodness, truth, and beauty I had so longingly sought.

It was during prayer before the Blessed Sacrament one day that I realized that I still wasn't sure what God wanted for my life. Had I ever even asked Him? Or was I too busy still carrying out my own plans? Was I scared to ask Him for fear of the answer? Probably. Therefore, I figured I would ease my fear by bringing my concerns to the Blessed Mother. I prayed to Mother Mary, asking her to make me like her; she was the perfect woman, the perfect wife, and the perfect mother, and that is what I believed God wanted me to be. Yet, Mary had given up all of her own life plans in order to love Christ, her Son, with all of her body, mind, and spirit. Therefore, in order to be like her, I had to pray as she did: “May it be done unto me according to your word.” Through the prayer of the Blessed Mother, I realized that Christ was indeed calling me to be a perfect wife and a perfect mother, but maybe just in a different way. Instead of being a wife to my own husband, I believe I am called to be a bride of Christ, and instead of being a mother to my own children, I believe I

“The man who I had been searching for, the man I had fallen so deeply in love with, had invited me to be His!”

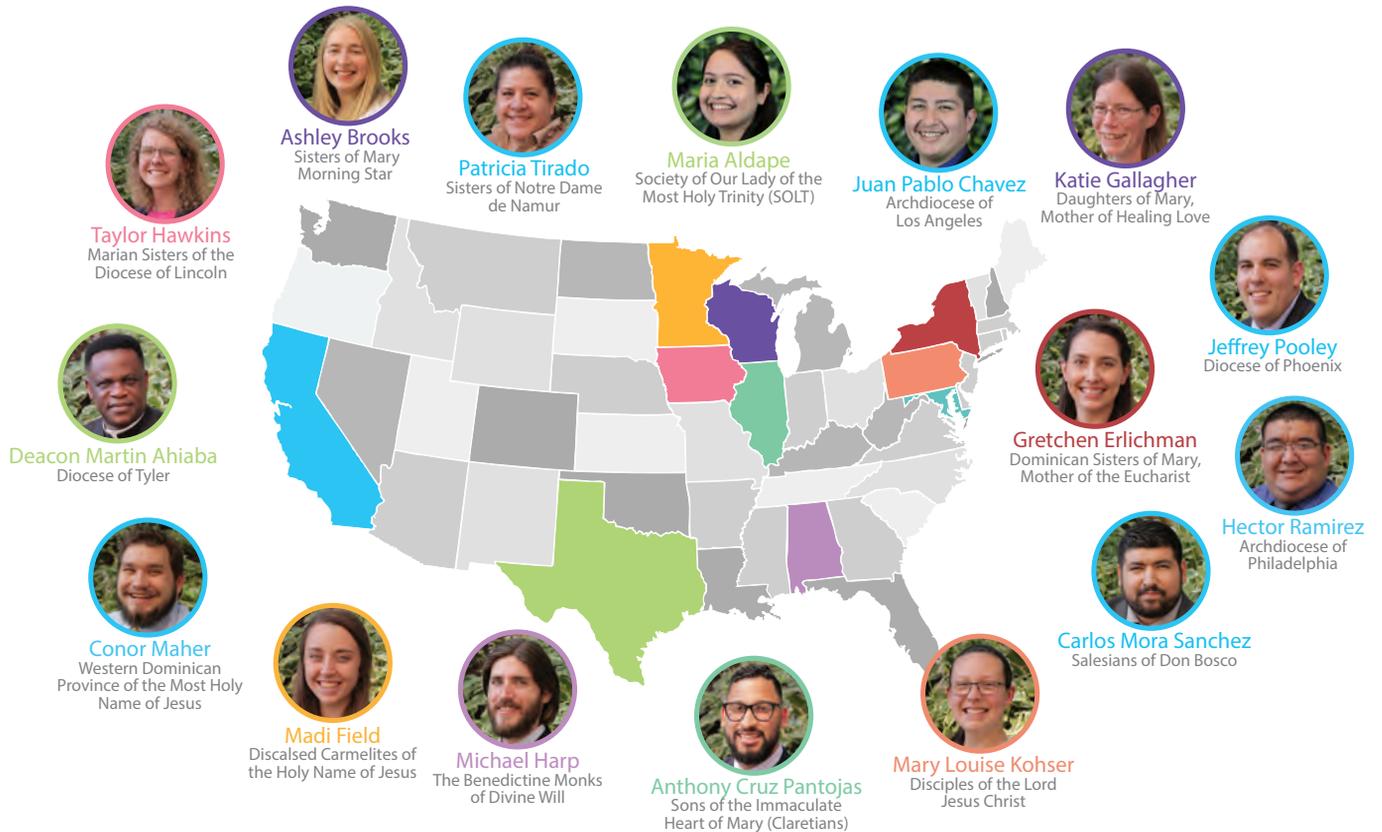
am being called to shower motherly love on all of God's children. In that moment of prayer, my eyes filled with tears of joy. The man who I had been searching for, the man I had fallen so deeply in love with, had invited me to be His! Thus, through continued prayer and through the grace of the Holy Spirit, I have accepted the invitation of the Lord to pursue a vocation to religious life.

Called to Serve: “Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.” - St. Catherine of Siena These words of the great Dominican saint are a constant source of inspiration as I continue to pursue my vocation as an aspirant with the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist. I believe that the Lord has blessed me with a Dominican heart and a Dominican mind. Dominican spirituality melds the fruits of the contemplative life with the harvest of the apostolic life through a balance of monastic and active practices. In embracing the charism of the Order of Preachers, the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist fully practice the Dominican tradition of prayer, study, and preaching through contemplation and the apostolate of teaching. In my vocation, I believe it is through this charism that I will “set the world on fire,” which is why I feel called to the community of the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist. I wish to follow Christ with love and abandon, and I desire to serve others out of love of Him. In one of her letters, St. Catherine of Siena states: “When we see ourselves loved so indescribably much by God, we run after love, loving God and whatever God loves most...because we see that the Creator loves His human creatures most of all, we love them, too; and the service we cannot do for God we do for other people for love of Him.” Although there will be many sacrifices, challenges, blessings, and joys along the way, it is with this kind of unbounded love that I wish to give my life unconditionally to Christ as a Dominican Sister of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist.

Prayer & Invitation: Please join me in praying for all those discerning a religious vocation, that they will be given the grace to live out their lives according to the word and the will of God. Please especially pray for me and my fellow aspirants with the Labouré Society, who must overcome the financial obstacles that lie between us and our call to pursue religious life. With trust in the goodness and grace of God and through your prayers and support we will all be able to fully live out our vocations. If you would like to learn more about my vocational journey or about how you can help, please contact me at gretchen@rescue vocations.org. Know that you are in my prayers. Thank you and God bless!

I am an aspirant of Labouré

I am also a fundraiser for a class of aspirants pursuing the priesthood or religious life. A recent study confirmed that nearly 1 of every 2 aspirants are blocked from entering their seminaries and religious communities because of student loan debt. It is the only thing that prevents many – including me – from entering formation to become a priest, sister or brother. My classmates are discerning all over the country.



With your help, we will rebuild the Church!

My goal is to raise \$60,000 (the average student loan amount) before December 31st of this year for The Labouré Society, a Catholic non-profit that helps aspirants like me to answer God's call.

Every aspirant has been accepted by a diocese or community and is required to work to liquidate their assets in order 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.

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!



Why is Labouré Needed?



10,000
Individuals discerning a priestly or religious vocation in the US annually*



42%
Are blocked from pursuing this call due to education loans*



\$60,000
The average amount our vocational aspirants in Labouré owe in educational loans

How does the Mission Work?



Are discerning a vocation and have been accepted into a diocese or religious institute

Are blocked from entering or continuing vocational formation due to student loans

Are trained by Labouré in Catholic-based fundraising and are provided with practical tools, personal mentoring, and accountability

Share their vocation stories with thousands of Catholic donors, thereby building a culture of vocations and evangelization

As a class of 20-25 aspirants raise funds collectively and receive awards from those funds to be applied to their debt



Works with aspirants to utilize all personal means to mitigate their loan amount prior to acceptance into the program

Trains each aspirant in Catholic-based philanthropy

Mentors each aspirant to build a unified team; each individual works toward the collective goal

Provides ongoing accountability and personal guidance to ensure proper preparation and completion of the individual fundraising plans of each aspirant

Equips each aspirant with an online fundraising platform and multi-media fundraising tools

Facilitates ongoing aspirant/donor communication and updates after aspirant enters formation

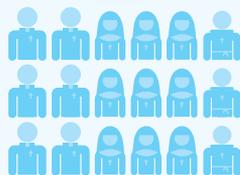
What Has Labouré Accomplished?

\$8 MILLION



Raised by Labouré aspirants since 2003

300+



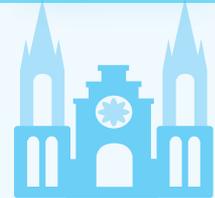
Assisted into formation to the priesthood or religious life

PROVEN



In operation since 2003

TRUSTED



Listed in the Official Catholic Directory

* NRVC, Vision Study, 2010

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. All gifts made to Labouré are non-refundable. 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.