

Chicago woman runs in order to raise funds to enter religious life

CHICAGO - When Alicia Torres laced up her running shoes and tackled the 13.1 miles of the Chicago Half Marathon Sept. 13, her goal was to become a nun.

Torres is not a runner and had never run a distance race. But she ran the race as part of an appeal to friends and strangers to help pay off more than \$90,000 in student loans so she can enter religious life.

When Torres felt God calling her to this vocation, she realized there was one major obstacle in her path - \$94,000 in student loans that must be paid off to enter the Franciscan community she's chosen. Most of her loans are held by private lenders so they can't be consolidated or the interest rates negotiated.

It is a contemporary issue. Men and women graduate from college with student loan bills and feel God calling them to join communities that take vows of poverty. But they must enter debt-free since the communities do not typically have resources to pay off the loans.

The 24-year-old graduated in 2007 from Loyola University Chicago with a degree in theology and bioethics and works in the Respect Life Office for the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Facing this large debt and feeling God's call to her becoming clearer every day, Torres chose to do something public to seek help. She took the "nun run" vocation idea literally and decided to run a half marathon to call attention to her situation and to encourage donations.

Torres created www.TheNunRun.com to chronicle her journey. Several of her friends ran the half marathon with her in solidarity.

She is also working with the Laboure Society (www.labourefoundation.org), a nonprofit that provides financial assistance to individuals who must eliminate personal debt in order to pursue their vocation to the priesthood or religious life.

Torres tells anyone who asks that she's not looking to get out of paying her loans. She will continue to work until they are paid and she can enter the community free and clear. She's just looking for help to realize her vocation sooner rather than later.

She is peppered with questions and comments whenever she shares her story. Why can't her parents pay the loans for her? (They don't have the means and still have kids at home.) Why doesn't she just get a better-paying job? (She's doing good work where she is.) Why can't the community pay it for her? (They have a vow of poverty.)

They are all questions she takes in stride and opportunities she uses for evangelization.

For more on Torres' story or to donate to her effort, visit www.TheNunRun.com.