

Nearly All of Religious Profession Class of 2015 Participated in Vocation Program, Served in Parish Ministry Prior to Pursuing Vocation

New men and women religious encouraged by friends, others on vocation journey Tended to know a member of their community for about five years prior to joining Average age of religious professing perpetual vows is 39

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WASHINGTON—Nearly all of the religious men and women who professed perpetual vows in 2015 had a strong, active parish life or participated in a vocation program or experience prior to entering their religious institute, according to the annual survey on men and women religious conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University. The report comes as the Catholic Church completes the global observance of the Year for Consecrated Life.

Nearly 84 percent participated in a vocation program prior to entering their religious institute, such as a “Come and See” experience (72 percent), or a vocation retreat (46 percent). Women were more likely than men (57 percent compared to 29 percent) to report participating in a vocation retreat before entering their religious institute.

“It is remarkable to think that 82 percent of those participating in the CARA survey served in one or more specified ministries in their parish community before entering their religious institute,” said Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Raleigh, North Carolina, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. “We know active participation in parish life is an important component for spiritual growth. I encourage those who are currently active in ministries and eligible to pursue a religious vocation to ask yourself if God might be calling you to consecrated life. Be assured that he will provide the strength and grace you need.”

Over four in ten respondents reported that they were encouraged to consider a vocation by a parish priest or a friend. Women are more likely than men to have been encouraged by both (46 percent compared to 34 percent).

Sister of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities Cheryl Wint found her vocation through her active parish life and a mission trip to Guatemala, giving up a successful business career. “After eight mergers within my career, I took some time off and went on a Franciscan Habitat trip to Guatemala where I had a very profound experience and knew it was time to make a change. So, during a Lenten penance service at my parish I felt the call to religious life and so pursued the call, which lead me to the sisters.”

Three in ten (30 percent) first became acquainted with their institute through promotional material, while one in five first learned about their institute from a priest or advisor. On average, these men and women religious knew a member of their institute for about five years before entering.

That was the case of Sister Maria Catherine Toon of the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, in Ann Arbor, Michigan. “I went to visit a friend who had just entered the community and ended up joining the same community three weeks later,” she said. “I ended up making vows in the same class as the friend I had visited.”

The USCCB’s Secretariat on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations commissioned CARA to conduct the survey of the religious profession class of 2015, and the results of the survey were released before the annual celebration of World Day for Consecrated Life. The entire survey and press release can be found at www.usccb.org/consecratedlife.

The survey polled women and men religious who professed perpetual vows in 2015 in a religious congregation, province, or monastery based in the U.S. CARA received a response from 447 of 790 major superiors, for an overall response rate of 57 percent among religious institutes. In all, 75 percent of LCWR superiors, 55 percent of CMSWR superiors, 52 percent of CMSM superiors, and 22 percent of superiors of contemplative communities provided contact information for 136 members who professed perpetual vows in religious life in 2015.

Of these 136 women and men, a total of 54 sisters and nuns and 35 brothers responded to the survey. These brothers may include some who intend to pursue studies leading to priestly ordination. This represents a response rate of 65 percent of the 136 potential members of the Profession Class of 2015 that were reported to CARA by major superiors.

Other major findings of the report are:

- Nearly all responding religious (90 percent) regularly participated in some type of private prayer activity before they entered their religious institute. About two-thirds participated in Eucharistic Adoration or prayed the rosary before entering. Nearly six in ten participated in retreats or spiritual direction before entering.
- Most religious did not report that educational debt delayed their application for entrance to their institute. Among the two who did report educational debt, however, they averaged less than a one year of delay while they paid down an average of \$35,000 in educational debt. Several of the women, but none of the men, reported receiving assistance in paying down their debt.
- The average age of responding religious is 39. Half of the responding religious are age 35 or younger. The youngest is 26 and the oldest is 76.
- Two-thirds of responding religious (68 percent) identify as white, more than one in six (16 percent) identifies as Asian, and more than one in ten (11 percent) identifies as Hispanic.

- Most responding religious (77 percent) were born in the U.S. Of those born outside the United States, the most common country of origin is The Philippines.
- Among those identifying as Hispanic/Latino six in ten (60 percent) are U.S. born. Those identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian (86 percent) are predominantly foreign born. Nearly all identifying as Caucasian/white (97 percent) are U.S. born.
- Almost half of responding religious (47 percent) attended a Catholic elementary school, which is about the same as that for all Catholic adults in the United States (42 percent). These respondents are more likely than other U.S. Catholics to have attended a Catholic high school (39 percent of respondents, compared to 22 percent of U.S. adult Catholics) and much more likely to have attended a Catholic college (43 percent of responding religious, compared to just 7 percent of U.S. adult Catholics). Responding women religious are less likely than brothers to have attended a Catholic college (37 percent for women compared to 51 percent for men).
- On average, responding religious report that they were 19 years old when they first considered a vocation to religious life, but half were 18 or younger when they first did so.
- One-half say that a religious sister or brother encouraged their vocation (52 percent).
- Respondents are less likely to report that they received encouragement from their family members than from other religious, friends, or a parish priest. One in three (34 percent) report that their mother encouraged them to consider religious life. Just under a quarter received encouragement from their father (22 percent) or other relatives (19 percent).

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