

**January 2021**

***Women and Men  
Professing Perpetual Vows  
in Religious Life:  
The Profession Class of 2020***



Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate  
Georgetown University  
Washington, DC

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in Religious Life: The Profession Class of 2020***

**A Report to the Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life  
and Vocations  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**



**January 2021**

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**Executive Summary**

This report presents findings from a national survey of women and men religious who professed perpetual vows in 2020 in a religious congregation, province, or monastery based in the United States. To obtain the names and contact information for these women and men, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) contacted all major superiors of all religious institutes that belong to either the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) or the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR), the two leadership conferences of women religious in the United States. CARA also contacted the major superior of all religious institutes who belong to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM). Finally, CARA contacted the major superiors of 132 contemplative communities of women in the United States that were identified by the USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. Each major superior was asked to provide contact information for every member of the institute who was scheduled to profess perpetual vows in 2020. CARA then contacted these men and women religious by e-mail or mail to explain the project and ask them to complete a brief survey.

After repeated follow-ups, CARA received a response from 549 of 747 major superiors, for an overall response rate of 73% among religious institutes. Two religious institutes were not interested in participating in the studies. In all, 85% of LCWR superiors, 77% of CMSM superiors, 69% of CMSWR superiors, and 47% of superiors of contemplative communities provided contact information for 172 members (75 women and 97 men) that professed perpetual vows in religious life in 2020

Of these 172 identified women and men religious, a total of 55 sisters and nuns and 57 brothers and priests responded to the survey by January 10, 2020. These 55 men include brothers, priests, and those pursuing studies leading to priestly ordination. This represents a response rate of 65% of the 172 potential members of the Profession Class of 2020 that were reported to CARA by major superiors.

## **Major Findings**

- Nearly nine in ten responding religious institutes (85%) had no one professing perpetual vows in religious life in 2020. One in ten institutes (9%) had one perpetual profession and just over one in twenty (6 percent) reported two or more. In total, the religious institutes report 172 newly perpetually professed members (75 women and 97 men) in 2020.
- The average age of responding religious of the Profession Class of 2020 is 38. Half of the responding religious are age 34 or younger. The youngest is 24 and the oldest is 71.
- Seven in ten responding religious (71%) report their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian, European American, or white. One in ten (13%) identifies as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian. Fewer than one in ten identifies as African/African American/black (7%). And one in 20 identifies as Hispanic/Latino(a) (5%).
- Three-fourths of the responding religious (76%) were born in the United States. Of those born outside the United States, the most common country of origin is Vietnam.
- On average, the respondents who were born outside the United States were 24 years old when they first came to the United States and lived here for 13 years before perpetual profession.

### ***Family Background***

- Three quarters of the respondents (75%) come from families in which both parents are Catholic. Just over four in five responding religious (84%) have been Catholic since birth. Among the 16% of respondents who became Catholic later in life, the average age at which they entered the Church was 20.
- Three-fourths of the responding religious (74%) have more than one sibling. A quarter (25%) has one brother or sister. A third (35%) report having two or three. Two-fifths (39%) have four or more siblings.
- Almost four in ten respondents with one or more siblings are somewhere in the middle of the family (38%). One-third are the eldest. One-quarter are the youngest.

### ***Education, Work, and Ministry Experience***

- Nearly half of the responding religious (45%) attended a Catholic elementary school, which is higher than that for all Catholic adults in the United States (16%). These respondents are also more likely than other U.S. Catholics to have attended a Catholic high school (38% of responding religious, compared to 8% of U.S. adult Catholics) and

much more likely to have attended a Catholic college (38% of responding religious, compared to 5% of U.S. adult Catholics).

- The Profession Class of 2020 is highly educated. A quarter of responding religious earned a graduate degree before entering their religious institute. Three-fourths (75%) entered their religious institute with at least a bachelor's degree (71% for women and 80% for men).
- Most responding religious did not report that educational debt delayed their application for entrance to their institute. Among 11% of respondents who did report educational debt, however, they averaged about 1.5 years of delay while they paid down an average of \$50,000 in educational debt. Friends/co-workers, family members, and their parish are the most common source of assistance for paying down educational debt.
- Nearly nine in ten (85%) had work experience prior to entering their religious institute. Of those who were employed, three-fifths (63%) had been employed full-time and one-fifth (22%) were employed part-time before entering their religious institute. Women religious are more likely than men to have been employed in health care.
- Nearly nine in ten responding religious (85%) served in one or more specified ministries before entering their religious institute, either in a paid ministry position or as a volunteer. The most common ministry experience reported by respondents was service as a lector (51%), followed by Extraordinary Minister of Communion (45%), youth ministry/campus ministry (45%), and altar server (44%).
- Three in four (74%) participated in one or more religious programs or activities before entering their religious institute. Two-fifths of respondents participated in youth ministry or youth group (39%) and young adult ministry or group (35%). Nearly three-tenths (27%) participated in Catholic campus ministry/Newman Center. One in seven (14%) participated in a World Youth Day. One in ten (10%) participated in a Franciscan University of Steubenville High School Youth Conference.
- Almost all responding religious (98%) regularly participated in some type of private prayer activity before they entered their religious institute. Four-fifths (80%) participated in Eucharistic Adoration. Three-fourths report doing retreats (74%) or praying the rosary (69%). Three-fifths (61%) had spiritual direction before entering their religious institute.

### ***Consideration of Religious Life and Choice of Community***

- On average, respondents 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.

- Nine in ten (89%) respondents report that someone encouraged them to consider a vocation to religious life. Respondents are less likely to report that they received encouragement from their family members than from parish priests, friends, or from a religious sister or brother.
- Almost three-fifths (56%) report that they were discouraged from considering a vocation to religious life by one or more persons. Women are more likely than men to report being discouraged from discerning a religious vocation (60% compared with 51% of men).
- On average, respondents report having known the members of their religious institute for four years before they entered. Three-tenths were first acquainted with their institute through a sponsored institution or work of the institute (27%). A quarter were first acquainted through print or online promotional material published by the institute (25%). One in five indicate that they first became acquainted with their institute through the recommendation of a priest or advisor (22%).
- Most (89%) had participated in at least one vocation/discernment program or experiences prior to entering their religious institute. Among the vocation programs and experiences about which they were asked, respondents are most likely to have participated in a “Come and See” experience. Three-fifths (62%) report participating in this program before they entered their religious institute.



## Introduction

Since 2010, the Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University to conduct a survey of women and men religious who profess perpetual vows each year in a religious congregation, province, or monastery based in the United States. For this project, CARA was asked to gather information about the characteristics and experiences of these religious and report the findings to the Secretariat for use with the World Day of Consecrated Life in February. CARA then programmed the questionnaires into an online survey to give respondents the option of completing the survey either online or on paper. This report presents results of this survey of women and men religious of the Profession Class of 2020.

To obtain the names and contact information for these women and men, CARA contacted all major superiors of all religious institutes that belong to either the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) or the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR), the two leadership conferences of women religious in the United States. CARA also contacted the major superior of all religious institutes who belong to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM). Finally, CARA contacted the major superiors of 132 contemplative communities of women in the United States that were identified by the USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. Each major superior was asked to provide contact information for every member of the institute who was scheduled to profess perpetual vows in 2020. CARA then contacted these men and women religious by e-mail or mail to explain the project and ask them to complete a brief survey.

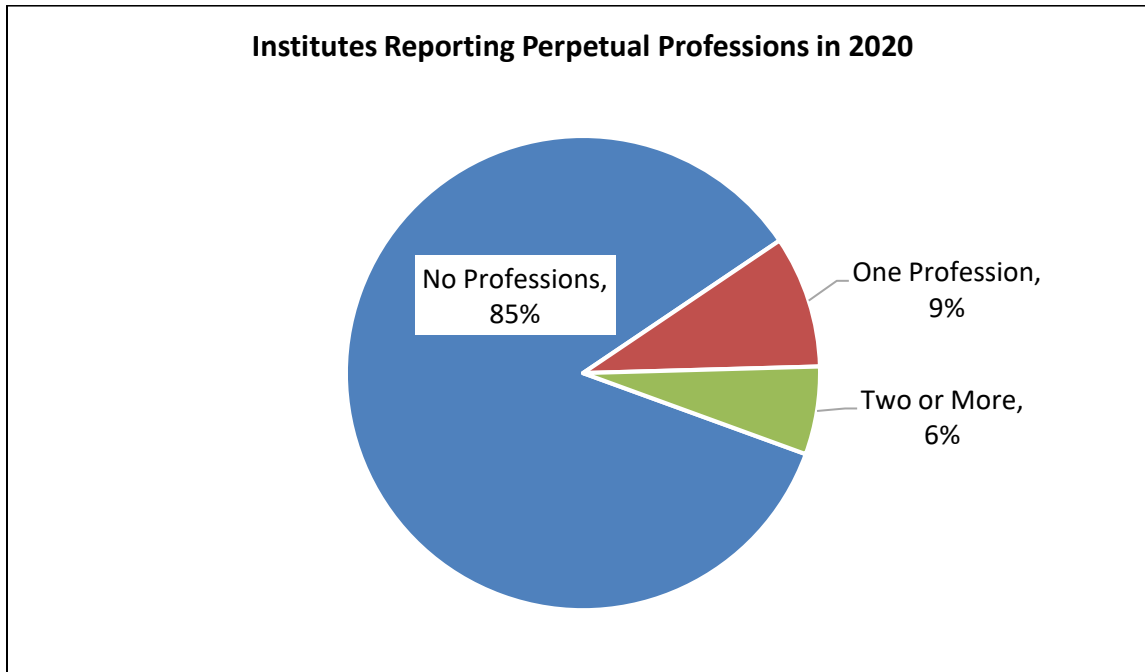
After repeated follow-ups, CARA received a response from 549 of 747 major superiors, for an overall response rate of 73% among religious institutes. Two religious institutes were not interested in participating in the studies. In all, 85% of LCWR superiors, 77% of CMSM superiors, 69% of CMSWR superiors, and 47% of superiors of contemplative communities provided contact information for 172 members (75 women and 97 men) that professed perpetual vows in religious life in 2020.

Of these 172 identified women and men religious, a total of 55 sisters and nuns and 57 brothers and priests responded to the survey by January 10, 2020. These 55 men include brothers, priests, and those pursuing studies leading to priestly ordination. This represents a response rate of 65 percent of the 172 potential members of the Profession Class of 2020 that were reported to CARA by major superiors.

The questionnaire asked these religious about their demographic and religious background, education and work experience, previous ministry or service and other formative experiences, encouragement and discouragement to consider religious life, initial acquaintance with their institutes, and vocation/discernment programs and experiences. This report presents analyses of each question from all responding religious.

## Institutes Reporting Perpetual Professions

CARA asked the 747 religious institutes, provinces, or monasteries in the United States that were identified by the two leadership conferences of women religious, the CMSM, and the USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations to provide the names of members who professed or were planning to profess perpetual vows in 2020. A total of 549 major superiors responded (73%) with 172 names of women religious, priests, and brothers. Two major superiors responded that they would not participate this year.



A total of 465 major superiors (85% of respondents) report that they had no one professing perpetual vows in 2020. One in ten institutes (9%) had one perpetual profession. Another 32 major superiors (6 percent) report from two to 11 members professing perpetual vows in 2020.

The sisters and nuns who responded to the survey represent 33 different religious congregations, provinces, or monasteries. Similarly, the brothers and priests who responded come from 35 different religious congregations, provinces, or monasteries of men religious.

## Age of Professed

The average age of responding religious of the Profession Class of 2020 is 38. Half of the responding religious are age 34 or younger.

<b>Age of Professed Women and Men</b>			
<i>Percentage in each age category</i>			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
29 and younger	24	20	29
Age 30-39	45	53	37
Age 40-49	14	15	14
Age 50-59	10	4	16
Age 60 and older	7	9	5
Average age	38	38	38
Median age	34	34	34
Range in ages	24-71	24-70	24-71

- A quarter of respondents (24%) make final profession at the age of 29 or younger. The two youngest are 24 years of age.
- Nearly half (45%) profess perpetual vows at age 30 to 39. One in ten make perpetual profession at age 40-49. And another one in ten do so at age 50-59.
- Fewer than one in ten respondents profess perpetual vows at age 60 or older. Seven percent are professing perpetual vows at this age range. The oldest priest/brother makes final profession at the age of 71.

## Country of Birth and Age at Entry to the United States

Seven in ten responding religious (73%) were born in the United States.

<b>Continent of Birth</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category</i>			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
North America	76	78	72
USA	73	76	70
Canada	3	2	4
Asia	12	11	13
Latin America	5	7	2
Africa	6	2	11
Europe	2	2	2

These respondents identified a total of 22 different countries of origin. Vietnam (4 religious) is the most frequently mentioned country of birth among responding religious who were born outside the United States.

Responding religious who were born outside the United States have lived in the United States for an average of 13 years. Half first came to live in the United States in 2008 or earlier.

<b>Entrance to the United States</b>				
	<u><b>Year</b></u>	<u><b>Age at Entry</b></u>		
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Mean	2006	24	19	27
Median	2010	26	22	27
Range	1986-2019	1-50	1-36	7-50

On average, responding foreign-born religious came to live in the United States at age 24. Half were age 26 or younger when they came to live in the United States. The youngest came to the United States at the age of one; the oldest entered the United States at the age of 50.

## Race and Ethnic Background

Seven in ten responding religious (71%) report their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian, European American, or white.

<b>Race and Ethnic Background</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category</i>			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
Caucasian/European American/white	71	74	68
Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	13	11	14
African/African American/black	7	4	11
Hispanic/Latino(a)	5	7	4
Other	4	4	4

- One in ten (13%) members of the Profession Class of 2020 identifies as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian. One in 16 identifies as African/African American/black (7%). And one in 20 identifies as Hispanic/Latino(a) (5%).
- Just 4% report their race and ethnic background as other:
  - Asian Indian
  - East Indian descent
  - Middle Eastern
  - Puertorican

### ***Differences by Country of Birth***

Responding religious who identify themselves as Caucasian/European American/white are almost all (94%) U.S. born. Just 6% were born outside the United States. Among those identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, nine in ten (93%) are foreign born, while 7% are U.S. born. Among those identifying as African/African American/black, nine in ten (88%) are foreign born, while about one in ten (12%) is U.S. born. Among those identifying as Hispanic/Latino(a) more than six in ten (67%) are foreign born while almost one-third (33%) are U.S. born.

## Family Background

Just over four in five responding religious (84%) have been Catholic since birth. Among those who became Catholic later in life, their average age at the time of their conversion was 20.

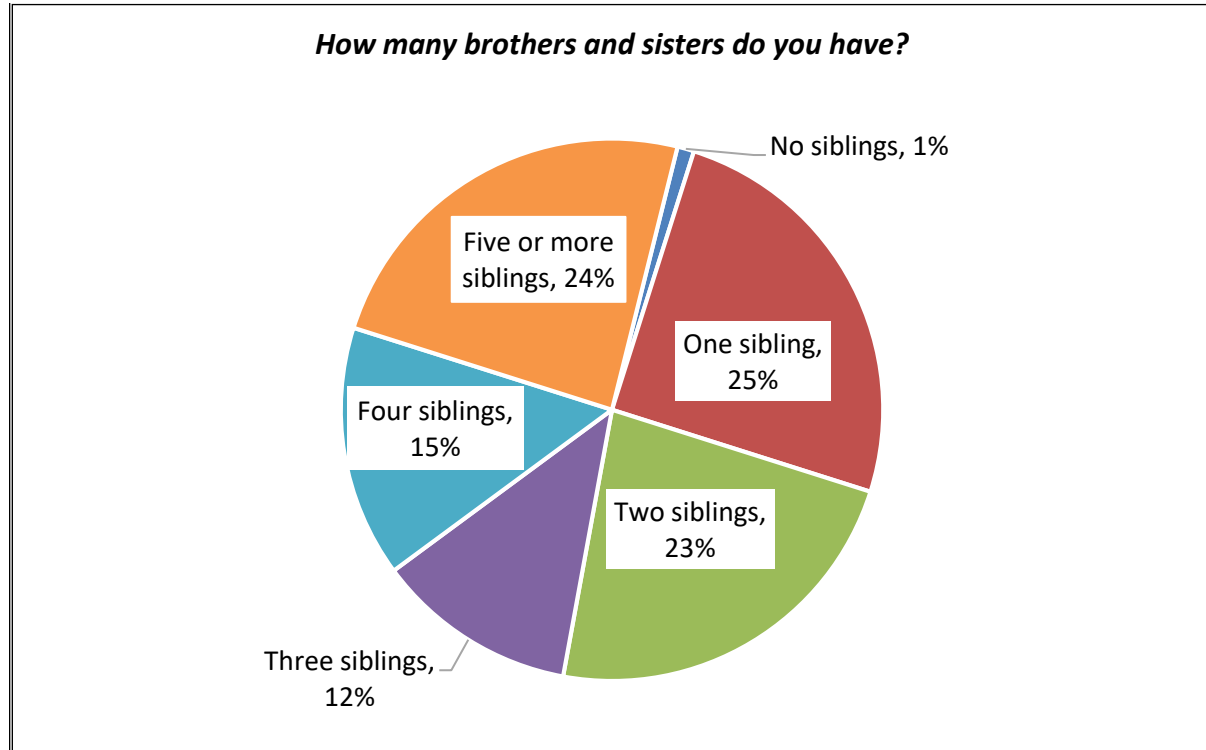
<b>Catholic Background</b>			
<i>Percentage responding</i>			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
Catholic since birth	84	89	79
Became Catholic later in life	16	11	21
Average age at entering the Church	20	20	20

Those who came into full communion with the Catholic Church from another denomination or those who converted from another faith tradition came from a variety of faiths: Baptist, Episcopalian, Evangelical, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Protestant.

Nine in ten respondents (92%) report that when they were children they had at least one parent who was Catholic. Three quarters (75%) report that both parents were Catholic.

<b><i>What was the religious background of your parents when you were a child?</i></b>			
<i>Percentage responding</i>			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
Both parents Catholic	75	80	70
Neither parent was Catholic	10	6	14
Mother Catholic, father not	9	11	7
Father Catholic, mother not	6	4	9

Almost all responding religious (99%) of the Profession Class of 2020 have at least one sibling. A quarter (25%) have one brother or sister. A third (35%) report having two or three. Two-fifths (39%) have four or more siblings.



Two-fifths (38%) of respondents are somewhere in the middle of their family. A third (33%) are the eldest child in their family. Nearly three in ten (28%) are the youngest.

**What is your birth order?**  
Percentage in each category

	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
Somewhere in the middle	38	47	30
Eldest	33	26	41
Youngest	28	26	30
Only child	1	2	0

In addition, just over a quarter of responding religious (28%) report having a relative who is a priest or a religious.

## Education

Half (50%) of responding religious attended parish-based religious education/CCD/RCIA. Nearly half (45%) attended a Catholic elementary or middle school. Two-fifths (38%) attended a Catholic high school. And another two-fifths (38%) attended a Catholic college before entering their religious institute.

<b>Attendance at Catholic School*</b>			
<i>Percentage responding</i>			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
Parish-based religious education/ CCD/RCIA	50	46	54
Catholic elementary or middle school	45	51	39
Catholic high school	38	42	34
Catholic college or university	38	40	37
Catholic ministry formation program	13	15	11
*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one category.			

Members of the Profession Class of 2020 are a little more likely than other U.S. adult Catholics to have attended a Catholic elementary school. In a 2016 national poll conducted by CARA,<sup>1</sup> 16% of U.S. adult Catholics report having attended a Catholic elementary school compared to 38% of the members of the Profession Class of 2020. Responding religious of 2020 are also more likely than other U.S. adult Catholics to have attended a Catholic high school (38% among responding religious, compared to 8% of U.S. adult Catholics) and much more likely to have attended a Catholic college (38% of responding religious, compared to 5% of U.S. adult Catholics).

In addition, just over one in ten (13%) responding women and men religious report that they participated in a Catholic ministry formation program before they entered their religious institute.

Whether or not they ever attended a Catholic elementary or high school, half of the respondents (51%) participated in a religious education program in their parish. Among respondents who said they participated in a religious education program in their parish, 75% did *not* report attending a Catholic elementary school and 80% did *not* attend a Catholic high school.

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<sup>1</sup>CARA Catholic Poll, 2016. Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.



One in ten (10%) responding religious report being home schooled at some time in their educational background. Among those who were home schooled, the average length of time they were home schooled was nine years. Women are more likely than men to be home schooled (8 women compared with 3 men).

The responding religious are highly educated. Three in four (74%) earned an undergraduate or graduate degree before entering their religious institute.

<b>Highest Education Completed Before Entering</b>			
<i>Percentage responding</i>			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
High school	9	13	5
Some college, no degree	16	16	16
Undergraduate degree	52	51	53
Graduate degree	23	20	27

Just one in ten (9%) religious of the Profession Class of 2020 completed only high school before entering the religious institute. Half (52%) had an undergraduate degree and one-quarter (23%) had a graduate degree before entering their religious institute. Responding sisters or nuns and brothers or priests are equally likely to have an undergraduate degree; however, men are slightly more likely to receive a graduate degree before entering their religious institute (27% compared to 20%).

## Educational Debt

*One in ten responding religious (11%) report that educational debt delayed their application for entrance to the religious institute. While 10 sisters report having educational debt, only two men religious report so.*

<b>Impact of Educational Debt on Entrance to Religious Life</b>			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Application delayed by debt	11%	18%	4%
Average length of delay	1.5 years	1.4 years	2 years
Average amount of debt	\$50,000	\$52,200	\$39,000
Median amount of debt	\$57,500	\$57,500	\$39,000

Among 12 religious who were delayed by educational debt, the average length of time required to pay off their educational debt was around 1.5 years. The average amount of educational debt they carried was \$50,000.

Among 12 religious who reported that educational debt delayed their application for entrance to a religious institute, they were most likely to receive assistance for paying down their educational debt from friends or co-workers, family members, and their parish.

<b>Assistance for Paying Down Educational Debt</b>			
<i>Among those delayed by educational debt</i>			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
Friends/co-workers	50	50	50
Family members	42	40	50
Parish	42	40	50
The Labouré Society	33	30	50
Knights of Columbus Fund	33	40	0
Religious community	25	20	50
Mater Ecclesiae Fund	17	20	0
Serra Fund for Vocations	0	0	0
Other	17	20	0

## Work Experience

Almost nine-tenths (85%) of responding religious report some type of work experience prior to entering the religious institute. Three-fifths (63%) had been employed full-time and one-fifth (22%) were employed part-time before entering their religious institute.

<b>Prior Work Experience</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category</i>			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
Business/Occupational	49	49	49
Education/Academic	31	33	29
Health care	10	14	4
Law	4	0	9
Church/pastoral ministry	3	2	4
Others	3	2	4

Half of responding religious (49%) report that they were in some form of business, or an occupation or trade, prior to entering their religious institute. Three-tenths had been employed in education (31%). One-tenths had been employed in the health care. Women are more likely than men religious to work in health care (14% compared with 4% of men religious).

## Participation in Religious Programs, Activities, or Ministries

Many responding religious were active in ministry before entering their religious institute. Nearly nine in ten responding religious (85%) served in one or more specified ministries before entering their religious institute, either in a paid ministry position or as a volunteer. The most common ministry experience reported by respondents was service as a lector, with half serving as a lector (51%).

<b>Ministry Experience*</b>			
<i>Percentage checking each response</i>			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
Lector	51	49	52
Extraordinary Minister of Communion	45	42	47
Youth ministry/campus ministry	45	47	42
Altar server	44	24	64
Faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA	38	38	39
Social service ministry (e.g., Catholic Charities program, other community service)	32	29	36
Music ministry, cantor, or choir	30	36	25
Teacher in a Catholic school	14	11	18
Hospital or prison ministry	10	9	11
*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one category.			

- Nearly half served Extraordinary Minister of Communion (45%) or youth ministry/campus ministry (45%).
- Four in ten report serving as an altar server (44%) or in faith formation, catechetical ministry, or RCIA (38%).
- Three in ten served in social service ministry (32%) or music ministry, cantor, or choir (30%).
- One in ten taught in a Catholic school (14%) or served in hospital or prison ministry (10%) before they entered their religious institute.

Three in four (74%) participated in one or more religious programs or activities before entering their religious institute.

<b>Participation in Religious Programs or Activities*</b>			
<i>Percentage checking each response</i>			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
Youth ministry or youth group	39	40	38
Young adult ministry or group	35	36	34
Catholic campus ministry/Newman Center	27	27	26
World Youth Day	14	13	16
Franciscan University of Steubenville High School Youth Conference	10	15	5
Fellowship of Catholic University Students	7	9	5
Religious institute volunteer	6	6	7
St. Vincent de Paul Society	5	9	0
National Catholic Youth Conference	3	4	2
National Evangelization Team	1	0	2
Catholic Scouting	—	**	5
Catholic Daughters	—	0	***
Knights of Columbus	—	**	9
Sodality	—	1	***

\*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one category.  
 \*\*Not asked of women.  
 \*\*\*Not asked of men.

- Two-fifths of respondents participated in youth ministry or youth group (39%) and young adult ministry or group (35%).
- Nearly three-tenth (27%) participated in Catholic campus ministry/Newman Center before entering religious life.
- One in seven (14%) participated in a World Youth Day prior to entering their religious institute.
- One in ten (10%) participated in a Franciscan University of Steubenville High School Youth Conference.

- Around one in eighteen participated in other activities, such as Fellowship of Catholic University Students (7%), religious institute volunteer (6%), and St. Vincent de Paul Society (5%).

## Private Prayer Practices and Prayer Groups

Private prayer and prayer groups are another type of formative experience that can help shape one’s religious faith and openness to consider a vocation. Almost all responding religious of the Profession Class of 2020 (98%) participated in one or more of these prayer practices or groups on a regular basis prior to entering their religious institute.

<b><i>Did you participate in any of these prayer practices or groups on a regular basis before entering your religious institute?</i></b>			
Percentage responding			
	<b>All</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
Eucharistic Adoration	80	87	72
Retreats	74	78	70
Rosary	69	75	64
Spiritual Direction	61	62	60
Faith-sharing group/Bible study	51	58	43
Lectio Divina	42	38	46

- Eucharistic Adoration is the most common type of formative prayer experience, reported by eight in ten religious of the Profession Class of 2020. Women are more likely than men to report doing Eucharistic adoration before entering religious life (87% compared to 72% of men).
- Seven in ten respondents (74%) had retreats or did rosary (69%). Women are more likely than men religious to report doing rosary before entering their religious institute (75% compared to 64% of men).
- Six in ten (61%) had spiritual direction before entering their religious institute.
- Half (51%) regularly participated in a faith-sharing group or a Bible study group. Women are more likely than men religious to have faith-sharing group/bible study (58% compared to 43%).
- Two-fifths (42%) regularly participated in *Lectio Divina* prayer prior to entering their religious institute. This is an ancient prayer practice from the Order of St. Benedict.

### Consideration of a Vocation to Religious Life

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 considered a vocation.

	Age		
	Both	Women	Men
Mean	19	20	18
Median	18	18	18
Range	5-60	5-60	5-53

### Encouragement to Consider a Vocation

Nine in ten (89%) responding religious report that someone encouraged them to consider a vocation to religious life.

Encouragement to Consider a Vocation to Religious Life*			
<i>Percentage checking each response</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Parish priest	45	40	50
Friend	41	42	41
Religious sister or brother	40	36	44
Mother	30	33	27
Parishioner	28	18	38
Other relative	20	20	20
Father	18	24	13
Teacher/Catechist	15	11	20
Campus minister/School chaplain	12	6	18
Youth minister	6	4	9
Bishop	5	6	5
Deacon	5	4	5

\*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one response.



- Nearly half (45%) report being encouraged by a parish priest to consider a vocation to religious life. Men are more likely than women to be encouraged by a parish priest. (50% compared to 40% of women religious).
- Two in five respondents say that a friend (41 percent) or a religious sister or brother (40 percent) encouraged their vocation.
- Three in ten indicate that their mother (30%) or parishioner (28%) encouraged them to consider religious life. Men are most likely to be encouraged by parishioners (38% compared to 18% of women religious).
- One in five report that their other relatives or father encouraged them to consider religious life. Women are more likely than men to be encouraged by their father (24% compared to 13% of men religious).
- Just over one in ten indicate that they were encouraged to discern religious life vocation by a teacher/catechist (15%) or a Campus minister/school chaplain (12%).
- Respondents are more likely to report that they received encouragement from their family members than from a bishop, deacon, or youth minister.

**Discouragement from Considering a Vocation**

Almost three-fifths (56%) report that they were discouraged from considering a vocation to religious life by one or more persons. Women are more likely than men to report being discouraged from discerning a religious vocation (60% compared with 51% of men religious).

<b>Discouragement from Considering a Vocation to Religious Life*</b>			
<i>Percentage checking each response</i>			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
Other relative	53	58	46
Father	43	39	46
Friend or school classmate	39	42	36
Mother	36	36	36
Colleague or coworker	18	21	14
Someone else	15	21	7
Priest or other clergy	12	15	7
Teacher	5	6	4
Religious sister or brother	2	3	0
Youth minister	0	0	0

\*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one response.

- Those who reported being *discouraged* from considering a vocation are most likely to report that they were discouraged by another relative (53%), or father (43%), or a friend or a school classmate (39%), or their mother (36%).
- Women are more likely than men to have been discouraged by their other relative (58% compared to 46% of men).
- Very few respondents say they were discouraged from considering a vocation by teachers, religious sisters or brothers, or youth ministers.

### Initial Acquaintance with the Religious Institute

On average, responding religious report that they knew the members of their religious institute four years before they entered.

<b><i>How many years did you know the members of your religious institute before entering?</i></b>			
	<b>Years</b>		
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Mean	4	4	5
Median	3	3	3
Range	1-26	1-26	1-20

Half of all responding religious report that they knew the members of their religious institute for three years before they entered. Three-tenths (28%) knew the members of their religious institute for one year before they entered.

Responding religious were asked to indicate how they first became acquainted with their religious institute.

<b><i>How did you first become acquainted with your religious institute?*</i></b>			
Percentage checking each response			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
In/through a sponsored institution or work of the institute (e.g., school, hospital)	28	22	33
Through print or online promotional material published by the institute	25	31	20
Through the recommendation of a priest or advisor	21	20	23
Through a friend or relative in the institute	13	15	12
Through a vocation matching or placement service	13	15	12
At a vocation event (e.g., Vocation Fair)	13	20	7
Through working with a Sister/Brother from the institute	8	7	9
Other	10	9	11

\*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one response.

- Three-tenths report being first acquainted with their institute through a sponsored institution or work of the institute (28%). Men are more likely than women religious to be recommended to their religious institute through this means (33% compared to 22% of women religious).
- A quarter were first acquainted through print or online promotional material published by the institute. Women are more likely than men to be acquainted with their religious institute through this means (31% compared to 20% of men religious).
- One in five indicate that they first became acquainted with their institute through the recommendation of a priest or advisor (22%).
- Just over one in ten indicate that they are acquainted with their religious institute through a friend or relative in the institute (13%), a vocation matching or placement service (13%), or at a vocation event (e.g., Vocation Fair) (13%). Women are more likely than men religious to get to know their religious institute at a vocation event (20% compared to 7% of men).
- One-tenth (10%) said they first became acquainted with their religious institute through some other means. Some of those “other” responses included:
  - Confirmation retreat
  - Conversation - coincidental
  - I attended a retreat at the seminary that the monastery runs.
  - I met the foundresses when in their previous community and contact one with a question and she let me know about their new community.
  - Just met a Carmelite Priest while on Pilgrimage
  - Liberation Theology reading group
  - Lived close by
  - Religious profession ceremony
  - Retreat
  - World Youth Day Madrid

## Vocation/Discernment Programs and Experiences

Most (89%) had participated in at least one of these programs or experiences prior to entering their religious institute. Among the vocation programs and experiences about which they were asked, respondents are most likely to have participated in a “Come and See” experience. Three-fifths (62%) report participating in this program before they entered their religious institute.

<b>Vocation/Discernment Programs and Experiences*</b>			
<i>Percentage checking each response</i>			
	<b>Both</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
	%	%	%
“Come and See” experience	62	58	66
Vocation retreat	51	55	48
Live-in experience	29	33	25
“Andrew Dinner”	—	**	1
“Nun Run”	—	6	***
Other	11	16	7

\*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one response.  
 \*\*Not asked of women.  
 \*\*\*Not asked of men.

- Half of responding religious (51%) participated in a vocation retreat before entering their religious institute.
- Three-tenths (29%) participated in some sort of live-in experience with their religious institute before entering.
- About one in twenty women religious report that they participated in a “Nun Run” (asked only of women), and just 1 percent of men had participated in an “Andrew Dinner” (asked only of men).

Respondents were also allowed to add any “other” vocational discernment experiences which they might have had. Their responses included the following:

- A diocesan vocation day
- A parish vocation discernment group open to women from various parishes.
- Catholics on Call
- Duc in Altum, run by the Salesian Sisters in Toronto
- Individual visit
- IRL
- Passionist Volunteer camps
- Seminary Sprint (included religious orders)
- Silent retreats
- Spent a few weekends at the provincial house
- Spiritual direction from a priest
- Visited other Benedictine Communities.

## **Appendix: Questionnaire with Response Frequencies**



**Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
Profession Class of 2020 National Survey**



This survey will help us to understand the characteristics of the women professing perpetual vows in religious life in 2020. In addition, some of the information will be used by the Secretariat in conjunction with the World Day of Consecrated Life to assist the media in offering positive and accurate information about the women who profess perpetual vows each year. The information you provide here will be combined with that of other religious women who have made or are making their profession of perpetual vows this year for use in press releases and highlighted on the USCCB website. **Your participation in this project is very important. No individual level information will be released without your express permission. Please respond by December 15.**

1. Name of your religious institute:

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2. Name of your monastery or province (if applicable):

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3. Your year of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Are you:    51 Male    49 Female

5. Were you born in the United States?    73 Yes    27 No

\_\_\_\_\_ 5a. If born outside the United States, in what year did you come to live in the United States?

6. Your primary race or ethnicity (Please select only one):

71 Caucasian/European American/white

7 African/African American/black

5 Hispanic/Latina

13 Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian/Middle Eastern

0 Native American/Alaska Native

0 Mixed race

4 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. How long have you been a Catholic?

84 Baptized Catholic as an infant (“cradle Catholic”)

16 Became a Catholic later in life

7a. If you answered “Became a Catholic later in life” in the previous question, how old were you when you became a Catholic? \_\_\_\_\_



7b. What was your previous religious affiliation? \_\_\_\_\_

8. What was the religious background of your parents when you were a child?

- 75 Both parents Catholic                      9 Mother Catholic, father non-Catholic  
10 Neither parent was Catholic              6 Father Catholic, mother non-Catholic

9. How many brothers and sisters do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

10. What is your birth order?

- 1 Only child   33 Eldest      28 Youngest                      38 Somewhere in the middle

11. Do (did) you have a relative who is a priest or a religious?      28 Yes      72 No

12. Did you attend any of the following before you entered your religious institute? (Please check all that apply):

- 50 Parish-based religious education/  
    CCD/RCIA                                      38 Catholic high school  
45 Catholic elementary or middle school      38 Catholic college or university  
13 Catholic ministry formation program

13. Were you ever home schooled?              10 Yes              90 No

13a. If "Yes," total number of years of home schooling: \_\_\_\_\_

14. What is the highest level of education you completed before entering your religious institute?

- 0 Elementary school (K-8)                      16 Some college, but not a Bachelor's degree  
9 High school                                      52 College or university undergraduate degree  
0 Trade or technical school                      23 Graduate degree

15. Did educational debt delay your application for entrance to your institute?

- 11 Yes              89 No

15a. If "Yes," approximately how long were you delayed? \_\_\_\_\_

15b. If "Yes," what was the amount of your educational debt: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

15c. If "Yes," did you receive assistance from any of these groups in paying down your debt?

(Please check all that apply)

- 42 Family members                                      33 The Labouré Society  
42 Parish    0 Serra Fund for Vocations  
25 Religious community                              33 Knights of Columbus Fund for Vocations  
50 Friends/co-workers                                      17 Other  
17 Mater Ecclesiae Fund for Vocations

16. Were you employed before entering your religious institute?

- 15 No                                      22 Yes, part-time                                      63 Yes, full-time

16a. *If yes, what was your main work experience prior to entering your religious institute?*

---

17. Were you involved in ministry before entering your religious institute?

15 No            62 Yes, as a volunteer    6 Yes, part-time            17 Yes, full-time

18. Did you serve in any of these **ministries** before entering your religious institute? (Please check all that apply)

44 Altar server	14 Teacher in a Catholic school
45 Extraordinary Minister of Communion	10 Hospital or prison ministry
51 Lector	32 Social service ministry (e.g., Catholic Charities program, other community (service))
30 Music ministry, cantor, choir	45 Youth minister or Campus minister
38 Faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA	

19. Did you participate in any of these **programs or activities** before entering your religious institute? (Please check all that apply)

5 Catholic Scouting (if male)	3 National Catholic Youth Conference
0 Catholic Daughters (if female)	1 National Evangelization Team (NET)
27 Catholic campus ministry/Newman Center	6 Religious institute volunteer (e.g., Mercy Volunteer Corps or Jesuit Volunteer Corps)
7 Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS)	5 St. Vincent de Paul Society
10 Franciscan University of Steubenville High School Youth Conference	14 World Youth Day
9 Knights of Columbus (if male)	35 Young adult ministry or group
1 Sodality (if female)	39 Youth ministry or youth group

20. Did you participate in any of these **prayer practices or groups** on a regular basis before entering your religious institute? (Please check all that apply)

80 Eucharistic Adoration	51 Faith-sharing group/Bible study
69 Rosary	74 Retreats
42 Lectio Divina	61 Spiritual direction

21. How old were you when you first considered a vocation to religious life? \_\_\_\_\_

22. Were you encouraged to consider religious life by any of these people? (Please check all that apply)

30 Mother	15 Teacher/Catechist	45 Parish Priest
18 Father	6 Youth Minister	40 Religious sister or brother
20 Other relative	12 Campus Minister /School Chaplain	5 Deacon
41 Friend	5 Bishop	
28 Parishioner		

23. Did anyone discourage you from considering religious life as a vocation?  
NR=1 56 Yes 46 No

23a. If "Yes" who discouraged you (Please check all that apply):

- |                               |                               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 36 Mother                     | 39 Friend or school classmate |
| 43 Father                     | 5 Teacher                     |
| 53 Other relative             | 0 Youth minister              |
| 12 Priest or other clergy     | 18 Colleague or coworker      |
| 2 Religious sister or brother |                               |
| 15 Someone else: _____        |                               |

24. How many years did you know the members of your religious institute before you entered? \_\_\_\_\_

25. How did you first become acquainted with your religious institute? (Please check all that apply)

- 28 In/through a sponsored institution or work of the institute (e.g., school, hospital)
- 8 Through working with a Sister from the institute
- 13 Through a friend or relative in the institute
- 21 Through the recommendation of a priest or advisor
- 25 Through print or online promotional material published by the institute
- 13 Through a vocation matching or placement service
- 13 At a vocation event (e.g., Vocation Fair)
- 10 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

26. Did you participate in any of these vocation/discernment programs before entering your religious institute? (Please check all that apply)

- |                              |                       |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 "Andrew Dinner" (if male)  |                       |
| 6 "Nun Run" (if female)      | 51 Vocation retreat   |
| 62 "Come and See" experience | 29 Live-in experience |
| 12 Other: _____              |                       |

27. Every religious has his/her own interesting story. Please briefly complete the following statement about yourself. This is to be **up to three sentences** that can be shared on the USCCB Profession Class of 2020 webpage. Please do not include overly personal information.

People might be surprised to know that I \_\_\_\_\_

28. Please provide the following information so that we may contact you for clarification about your survey responses, if needed. This contact information will not be shared without your express permission:

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

29. I permit the USCCB to use my name, statement, and photograph on the Profession Class of 2020 webpage.

Yes  No I permit the USCCB to use my name, statement, and photograph on the Profession Class of 2020 webpage.

**You are invited to submit an individual, self-taken photo (a clear headshot) in digital format to be featured on the USCCB website, "Meet the Profession Class."** You are also encouraged to respond to the prompt (i.e., "People might be surprised to know that I ..."), so that both your picture and quote can be published on the website. For an example on how this information is displayed, please visit <https://www.usccb.org/committees/clergy-consecrated-life-vocations/profession-classes>.

**Please submit your headshot to [clergy@usccb.org](mailto:clergy@usccb.org). Please include your name and the name of your religious institute in the email. Submissions must be received by December 31.**

Thank you for participating in this survey. This project presents religious life in a positive light and is meant to be an encouragement for the faithful.

– Father Luke Ballman, Director  
USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations

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