

**January 2020**

***Women and Men  
Professing Perpetual Vows  
in Religious Life:  
The Profession Class of 2019***



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

*Women and Men Professing Perpetual Vows  
in Religious Life: The Profession Class of 2019*

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



**January 2019**

Thu T. Do, LHC, Ph.D.  
Thomas P. Gaunt, SJ, Ph.D.



## Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary .....  | 1  |
| Major Findings.....  | 2  |
| Introduction.....  | 5  |
| Institutes Reporting Perpetual Professions .....                     | 6  |
| Age of Professed.....  | 7  |
| Race and Ethnic Background.....                                      | 8  |
| Country of Birth and Age at Entry to the United States .....         | 9  |
| Family Background.....   | 10 |
| Education .....  | 12 |
| Educational Debt.....  | 14 |
| Work Experience .....  | 15 |
| Participation in Religious Programs, Activities, or Ministries ..... | 16 |
| Private Prayer Practices and Prayer Groups .....                     | 18 |
| Consideration of a Vocation to Religious Life .....                  | 19 |
| Initial Acquaintance with the Religious Institute.....               | 21 |
| Vocation/Discernment Programs and Experiences.....                   | 24 |
| Appendix: Questionnaire with Response Frequencies .....              | 26 |

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

***Women and Men Professing Perpetual Vows  
in Religious Life: The Profession Class of 2019***

**Executive Summary**

This report presents findings from a national survey of women and men religious who professed perpetual vows in 2019 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 133 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 2019. 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 558 of 747 major superiors, for an overall response rate of 75 percent among religious institutes. Two religious institutes were not interested in participating in the studies. In all, 87 percent of LCWR superiors, 70 percent of CMSWR superiors, 69 percent of CMSM superiors, and 61 percent of superiors of contemplative communities provided contact information for 186 members that professed perpetual vows in religious life in 2019.

Of these 186 identified women and men religious, a total of 62 sisters and nuns and 48 brothers and priests responded to the survey by January 12, 2020. These 48 men include brothers, priests, and those pursuing studies leading to priestly ordination. This represents a response rate of 59 percent of the 186 potential members of the Profession Class of 2019 that were reported to CARA by major superiors.

## **Major Findings**

- Eight in ten responding religious institutes (83 percent) had no one professing perpetual vows in religious life in 2019. One in ten institutes (11 percent) had one perpetual profession and just over one in twenty (6 percent) reported two or more.
- The average age of responding religious of the Profession Class of 2019 is 39. Half of the responding religious are age 34 or younger. The youngest is 24 and the oldest is 71.
- Two-thirds of the responding religious (69 percent) report their primary race or ethnicity as white. One in ten (10 percent) identifies as Hispanic, and one in ten (9 percent) identify as Asian.
- Three in four of responding religious (74 percent) were born in the United States. Of those born outside the United States, the most common country of origin is the Philippines.
- On average, the respondents who were born outside the United States were 25 years old when they first came to the United States and lived here for 25 years before perpetual profession.

### ***Family Background***

- Almost nine in ten responding religious (87 percent) have been Catholic since birth. Four-fifths (80 percent) come from families in which both parents are Catholic. Among the 10 percent of respondents who became Catholic later in life, the average age at which they converted was 23.
- Nearly eight in ten responding religious (79 percent) of the Profession Class of 2019 have more than one sibling. One in five (21 percent) has one brother or sister. Just over two in five (44 percent) report having two or three. Just over a third (35 percent) has four or more siblings.
- Almost four in ten of respondents with one or more siblings are the eldest child in their family (37 percent). One-third are the youngest. One-quarter are somewhere in the middle of their family.

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

- Half of the responding religious (50 percent) attended a Catholic elementary school, which is higher than that for all Catholic adults in the United States (39 percent). These respondents are also more likely than other U.S. Catholics to have attended a Catholic high school (38 percent of responding religious, compared to 19 percent of U.S. adult Catholics) and much more likely to have attended a Catholic college (42 percent of responding religious, compared to 10 percent of U.S. adult Catholics).

- The Profession Class of 2019 is highly educated. Twenty-five percent of responding religious earned a graduate degree before entering their religious institute. Three-fourths (74 percent) entered their religious institute with at least a bachelor's degree (77 percent for women and 69 percent for men).
- Most religious did not report that educational debt delayed their application for entrance to their institute. Among the 8 percent who did report educational debt, however, they averaged about 2 years of delay while they paid down an average of \$29,169 in educational debt. Family members, parish, and religious community are the most common source of assistance for paying down educational debt.
- Just over four in five (84 percent) had work experience prior to entering their religious institute. Of those who were employed, one-quarter (26 percent) were employed part-time and almost three in five (58 percent) were employed full-time before entering the institute. Women religious are more likely than men to have been employed in education or health care, while men religious are more likely than women to have been employed in business.
- Around nine in ten responding religious (89 percent) served in one or more church ministries before entering their religious institute, most commonly as a lector (51 percent), altar server (44 percent), or Extraordinary Minister of Communion (42 percent). About two in five served in faith formation, catechetical ministry, or RCIA and youth minister or Campus minister (37 percent). Three-tenth served in social service ministry. Just over one-tenth taught in a Catholic school.
- Seven in ten (70 percent) participated in one or more religious programs or activities before entering before entering their religious institute. Just over four in ten (44 percent) participated in youth ministry or youth group. A quarter (24 percent) participated in young adult ministry and Catholic campus ministry/Newman Center. One-sixth participated in World Youth Day. Just over one-tenth participated in the Franciscan University of Steubenville High School Youth Conference.
- Nine in ten responding religious (91 percent) regularly participated in some type of private prayer activity before they entered their religious institute. Three-fifths or more participated in Eucharistic Adoration or prayed the rosary before entering. Nearly six in ten participated in spiritual direction or retreats before entering.

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

- 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.
- Almost nine-tenths (85 percent) responding religious 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 friends, other religious, parish priests, or from a religious sister or brother.



- Just over three-fifths (64 percent) report that they were discouraged from considering a vocation by one or more persons.
- On average, responding religious report that they knew the members of their religious institute for five years before they entered. About a quarter (26 percent) report that they first became acquainted with their institute through print or online promotional material. One in five reported knowing their religious institute in/through a sponsored institution or work of the institute (e.g., school, hospital) and through the recommendation of a priest or advisor. Just over one-tenth reported knowing their religious institute through a friend or relative in the institute. About one in twenty respondents knew their religious institutes through a vocation matching or vocation event.
- Nearly all of the religious of the Profession Class of 2019 (87 percent) participated in some type of vocation program or experience prior to entering their religious institute. “Come and See” experiences are a popular vocation program, experienced by about two in three (67 percent) before entering their religious institute. Nearly half responding religious (45 percent) participated in a vocation retreat, and three in ten did live-in experience before entering 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 2019.

To obtain the names and contact information for the religious professing perpetual vows in 2019, CARA contacted all major superiors of all religious institutes that belong to either the Leadership Conference of Women Religious or the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, 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 133 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 2019. CARA then contacted these members by e-mail or mail to explain the project and ask them to complete a brief online survey.

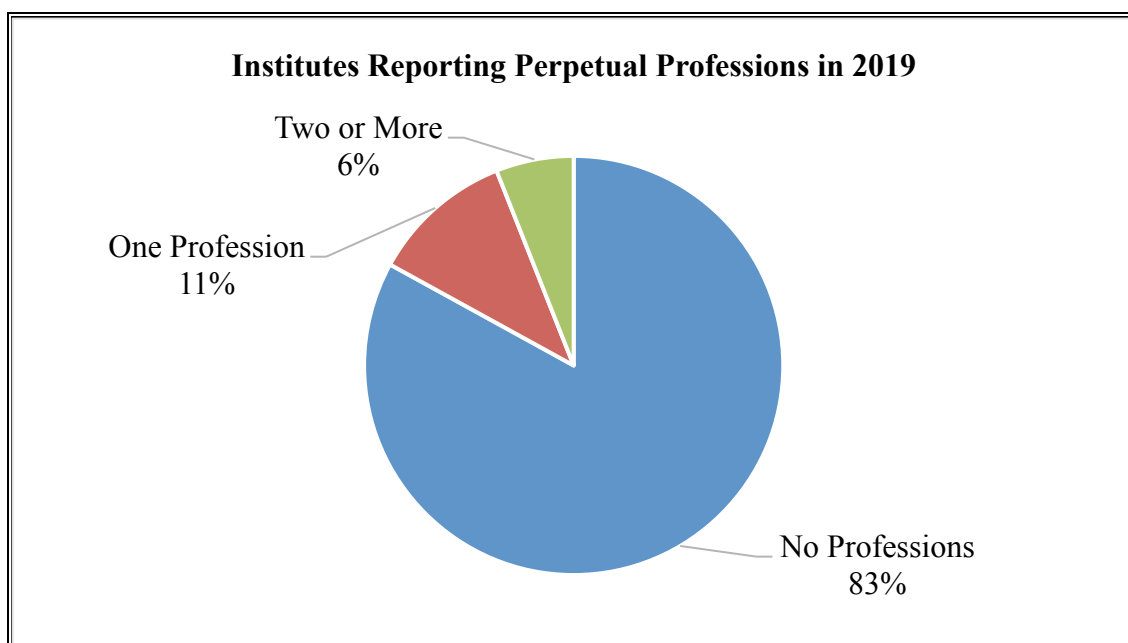
After repeated follow-ups, CARA received a response from 558 of 747 major superiors, for an overall response rate of 75 percent among religious institutes. Two religious institutes were not interested in participating in the studies. In all, 87 percent of LCWR superiors, 70 percent of CMSWR superiors, 69 percent of CMSM superiors, and 61 percent of superiors of contemplative communities provided contact information for 186 members that professed perpetual vows in religious life in 2019.

Of these 186 identified women and men religious, a total of 62 sisters and nuns and 48 brothers and priests responded to the survey by January 12, 2020. These 48 men include brothers, priests, and those pursuing studies leading to priestly ordination. This represents a response rate of 59 percent of the 186 potential members of the Profession Class of 2019 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, or 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 2019. A total of 556 major superiors responded (75 percent) with 186 names of women religious, priests, and brothers. Two major superiors responded that they would not participate this year.



A total of 462 major superiors (83 percent of those responding) report that they had no one professing perpetual vows in 2019. One in ten institutes (11 percent) had one perpetual profession. Another 34 major superiors (6 percent) report from two to 14 members professing perpetual vows in 2019.

The sisters and nuns who responded to the survey represent 39 religious congregations, provinces, or monasteries. Similarly, the brothers and priests who responded come from 26 different religious congregations, provinces, or monasteries of men religious.

## Age of Professed

*The average age of responding religious of the Profession Class of 2019 is 39. 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                         | 21          | 11           | 34         |
| Age 30-39                              | 47          | 48           | 45         |
| Age 40-49                              | 11          | 10           | 13         |
| Age 50-59                              | 10          | 16           | 2          |
| Age 60 and older                       | 11          | 15           | 6          |
| <br>                                   |             |              |            |
| Average age                            | 39          | 41           | 35         |
| Median age                             | 34          | 35           | 32         |
| Range in ages                          | 24-71       | 25-68        | 24-71      |

The youngest responding sister or nun of the Profession Class of 2019 is 25 and the oldest is 68 years of age. Nine women respondents are professing perpetual vows at age 60 or older. Two-thirds of the responding sisters are 39 or younger. Among men respondents, the youngest is 24 and the oldest is 71. Four in five responding men religious are 39 or younger.

## Race and Ethnic Background

*Two-thirds of the responding religious (68 percent) 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      | 68          | 76           | 57         |
| Hispanic/Latino(a)                     | 10          | 5            | 17         |
| Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian | 9           | 7            | 13         |
| African/African American/black         | 8           | 8            | 9          |
| Mixed race                             | 3           | 5            | 0          |
| Other                                  | 2           | 0            | 4          |

One in ten (10 percent) members of the Profession Class of 2019 identifies as Hispanic/Latino(a). And nearly one in ten identifies as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian.

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

Responding religious who identify themselves as Caucasian/European American/white are almost all (91 percent) U.S. born. Just 8 percent were born outside the United States. Among those identifying as Hispanic/Latino(a) more than six in ten (64 percent) are foreign born while almost one-third (31 percent) are U.S. born. Among those identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, four in five (80 percent) are foreign born, while about one in five (20 percent) is U.S. born.

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

*Three in four responding religious (74 percent) 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<br>(USA & Canada)    | 77          | 82           | 71         |
| Asia                               | 9           | 7            | 13         |
| Latin America                      | 6           | 2            | 10         |
| Africa                             | 6           | 7            | 6          |
| Europe                             | 1           | 2            | 0          |
| Oceania                            | 1           | 2            | 0          |

The Philippines (5 religious) is the most frequently mentioned country of birth among responding religious who were born outside the United States. These respondents identified a total of 19 different countries of origin.

*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> |             |                     |              |            |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------|--------------|------------|
|                                      | <b>Year</b> | <b>Age at Entry</b> |              |            |
|                                      | <b>Both</b> | <b>Both</b>         | <b>Women</b> | <b>Men</b> |
| Mean                                 | 2006        | 25                  | 26           | 24         |
| Median                               | 2008        | 28                  | 27           | 28         |
| Range                                | 1978-2019   | 5-43                | 15-43        | 15-43      |

On average, responding foreign-born religious came to live in the United States at age 25. Half were age 28 or younger when they came to live in the United States. The youngest came to the United States at the age of five; the oldest woman was 43 at the time she entered the United States.

## Family Background

*Nearly nine in ten responding religious (87 percent) have been Catholic since birth. Among those who became Catholic later in life, their average age at the time of their conversion was 23.*

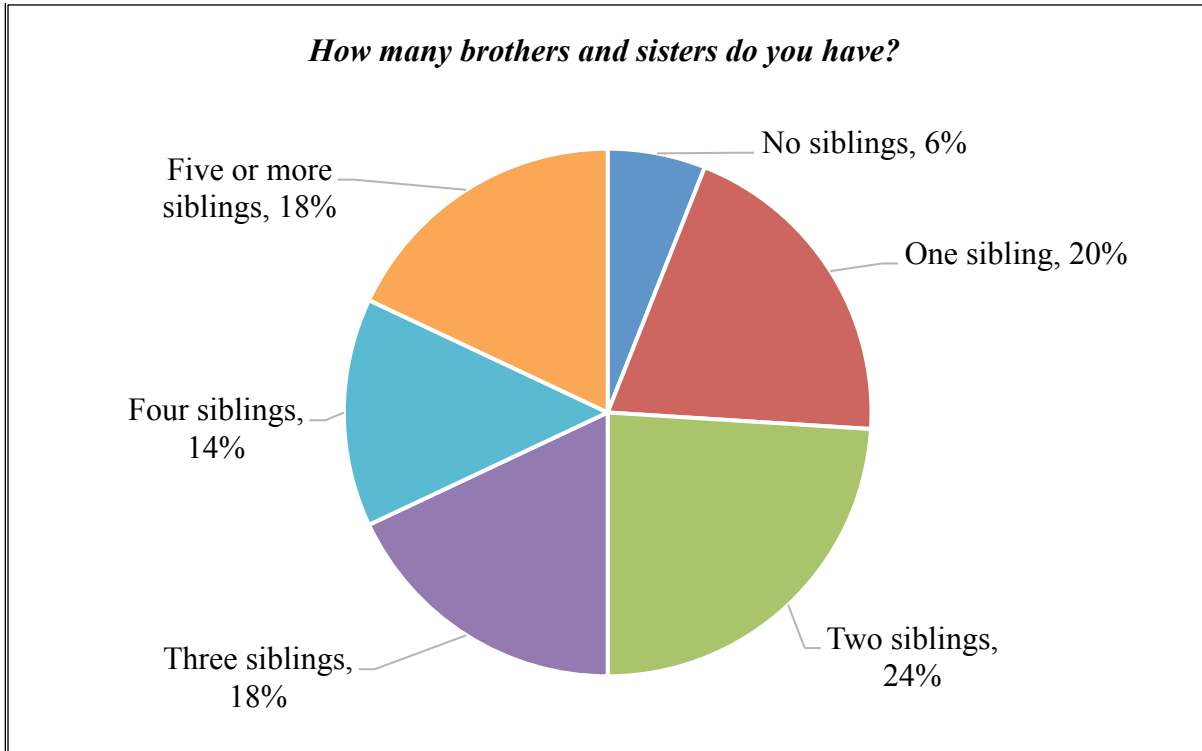
| <b>Catholic Background</b>    |             |              |            |
|-------------------------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
|                               | <b>Both</b> | <b>Women</b> | <b>Men</b> |
|                               | <b>%</b>    | <b>%</b>     | <b>%</b>   |
| Catholic since birth          | 87          | 92           | 81         |
| Became Catholic later in life | 13          | 8            | 19         |
| Average age at conversion     | 23          | 33           | 17         |

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, Jewish, Lutheran, Methodist, Non-denominational Christian Presbyterian, Protestant, and United Methodist.

*Nine in ten respondents (90 percent) report that when they were children they had at least one parent who was Catholic. Four in five (80 percent) report that both parents were Catholic.*

| <b><i>What was the religious background of your parents when you were a child?</i></b> |             |              |            |
|--|-------------|--------------|------------|
| Percentage responding  |             |              |            |
|  | <b>Both</b> | <b>Women</b> | <b>Men</b> |
|  | <b>%</b>    | <b>%</b>     | <b>%</b>   |
| Both parents Catholic  | 80          | 86           | 73         |
| Neither parent was Catholic  | 10          | 7            | 15         |
| Mother Catholic, father not  | 6           | 7            | 6          |
| Father Catholic, mother not  | 4           | 2            | 6          |

Almost all responding religious (93 percent) of the Profession Class of 2019 have at least one sibling. One in five (20 percent) have one brother or sister. A third (32 percent) report having two or three. Another third (32 percent) have four or more siblings.



Almost two in five of respondents are the eldest child in their family (37 percent). A third are the youngest. More than a quarter are somewhere in the middle of their family.

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

|                         | Both | Women | Men |
|-------------------------|------|-------|-----|
|                         | %    | %     | %   |
| Eldest                  | 37   | 42    | 31  |
| Somewhere in the middle | 26   | 27    | 25  |
| Youngest                | 33   | 27    | 40  |
| Only child              | 4    | 3     | 4   |

In addition, just over a quarter responding religious (27 percent) report having a relative who is a priest or a religious.



## Education

*More than half (54 percent) of responding religious attended parish-based religious education/CCD/RCIA. One-half (50 percent) attended a Catholic elementary or middle school. Around two in five (38 percent) attended a Catholic high school, and just over two in five (42 percent) 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 | 54          | 57           | 50         |
| Catholic elementary or middle school      | 50          | 44           | 58         |
| Catholic high school                      | 38          | 36           | 42         |
| Catholic college or university            | 42          | 39           | 46         |
| Catholic ministry formation program       | 13          | 13           | 13         |

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

Members of the Profession Class of 2019 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> 39 percent of U.S. adult Catholics report having attended a Catholic elementary school compared to half of the members of the Profession Class of 2019. Responding religious of 2019 are also more likely than other U.S. adult Catholics to have attended a Catholic high school (38 percent among responding religious, compared to 19 percent of U.S. adult Catholics) and much more likely to have attended a Catholic college (42 percent of responding religious, compared to 10 percent of U.S. adult Catholics).

In addition, just over one in ten (13 percent) 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, more than a half of the respondents (54 percent) participated in a religious education program in their parish. Among respondents who said they participated in a religious education program in their parish,

---

<sup>1</sup>CARA *Catholic Poll*. Poll conducted May 16-26, 2016. Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

66 percent did *not* report attending a Catholic elementary school and 76 percent did *not* attend a Catholic high school.

One in six (16 percent) 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. Sisters are more likely than men religious to be home schooled (10 sisters compared with 6 men religious).

*The responding religious are highly educated. Three in four (74 percent) 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  | 15          | 13           | 17         |
| Trade or technical school                          | 2           | 2            | 2          |
| Some college, no degree                            | 10          | 8            | 13         |
| Undergraduate degree                               | 49          | 48           | 50         |
| Graduate degree                                    | 25          | 29           | 19         |

Just over one-tenth (15 percent) religious of the Profession Class of 2019 completed only high school before entering the religious institute. Half (49 percent) had an undergraduate degree and one-quarter (25 percent) had a graduate degree before entering their religious institute. Responding sisters or nuns are more likely than responding brothers or priests to have an undergraduate or graduate degree before entering their religious institute (77 percent compared with 69 percent of brothers or priests).

## Educational Debt

*Eight percent of responding religious report that educational debt delayed their application for entrance to the religious institute. While six sisters reported having educational debt, only three men religious reported 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                                     | 8%          | 10%          | 6%         |
| Average length of delay   | 2 years     | 2.3 years    | 1.5 years  |
| Average amount of debt  | \$29,169    | \$24,558     | \$43,000   |
| Median amount of debt   | \$20,000    | \$20,000     | \$43,000   |

Most responding religious of the Profession Class of 2019 report that educational debt did not delay their application for entrance. Among the 8 percent who were delayed by educational debt, the average length of time required to pay off their educational debt was around 2 years. The average amount of educational debt they carried was \$29,169.

Among the 8 percent of respondents 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 family members and from friends or co-workers.

| <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> |
|  | %           | %            | %          |
| Family members                                     | 67          | 67           | 67         |
| Friends/co-workers                                 | 33          | 33           | 33         |
| Parish   | 44          | 50           | 33         |
| Religious community                                | 44          | 33           | 67         |
| Mater Ecclesiae Fund                               | 22          | 33           | 0          |
| Labouré Society                                    | 11          | 17           | 0          |
| Knights of Columbus Fund                           | 11          | 17           | 0          |
| Serra Fund for Vocations                           | 0           | 0            | 0          |

## Work Experience

*More than four in five (84 percent) responding religious report some type of work experience prior to entering the religious institute. Almost six in ten (58 percent) had been employed full-time and one-quarter (26 percent) were employed part-time before entering their institute.*

| <b>Prior Work Experience</b>       |             |              |            |
|------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| <i>Percentage in each category</i> |             |              |            |
|                                    | <b>Both</b> | <b>Women</b> | <b>Men</b> |
|                                    | %           | %            | %          |
| Business/Occupational              | 52          | 54           | 49         |
| Education/Academic                 | 29          | 25           | 36         |
| Church/pastoral ministry           | 12          | 11           | 15         |
| Health care                        | 6           | 9            | 0          |
| Government/Military                | 1           | 2            | 0          |

Half of responding religious (52 percent) reported 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 (29 percent). Men were more likely than women to report that they had been employed in education/academic fields prior to entering their institute.

## Participation in Religious Programs, Activities, or Ministries

*Many responding religious were active in ministry before entering their religious institute. Nine in ten responding religious (89 percent) 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, followed by altar server, Extraordinary Minister of Communion.*

| <b>Ministry Experience*</b>  |             |              |            |
|--|-------------|--------------|------------|
| <i>Percentage checking each response</i>   |             |              |            |
|  | <b>Both</b> | <b>Women</b> | <b>Men</b> |
|  | %           | %            | %          |
| Lector   | 51          | 50           | 52         |
| Altar server   | 44          | 31           | 60         |
| Extraordinary Minister of Communion  | 42          | 52           | 29         |
| Faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA   | 37          | 39           | 35         |
| Youth ministry/campus ministry   | 37          | 31           | 46         |
| Social service ministry (e.g., Catholic Charities program, other community service)        | 31          | 32           | 29         |
| Music ministry, cantor, or choir   | 30          | 32           | 27         |
| Teacher in a Catholic school   | 15          | 18           | 10         |
| Hospital or prison ministry  | 6           | 3            | 8          |
| *Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one category. |             |              |            |

- Half reported serving as a lector (51 percent), with four in ten serving as an altar server (44 percent) or Extraordinary Minister of Communion (42 percent).
- Two in five reported serving in faith formation, catechetical ministry, or RCIA (37 percent) or youth ministry/campus ministry (37 percent)
- Three in ten served in social service ministry (e.g., Catholic Charities program, other community service) or music ministry, cantor, or choir (30 percent).
- Responding religious were *least* likely to have served in a hospital or prison ministry before they entered their religious institute.

*Seven in ten (70 percent) participated in one or more religious programs or activities before entering their religious institute.*

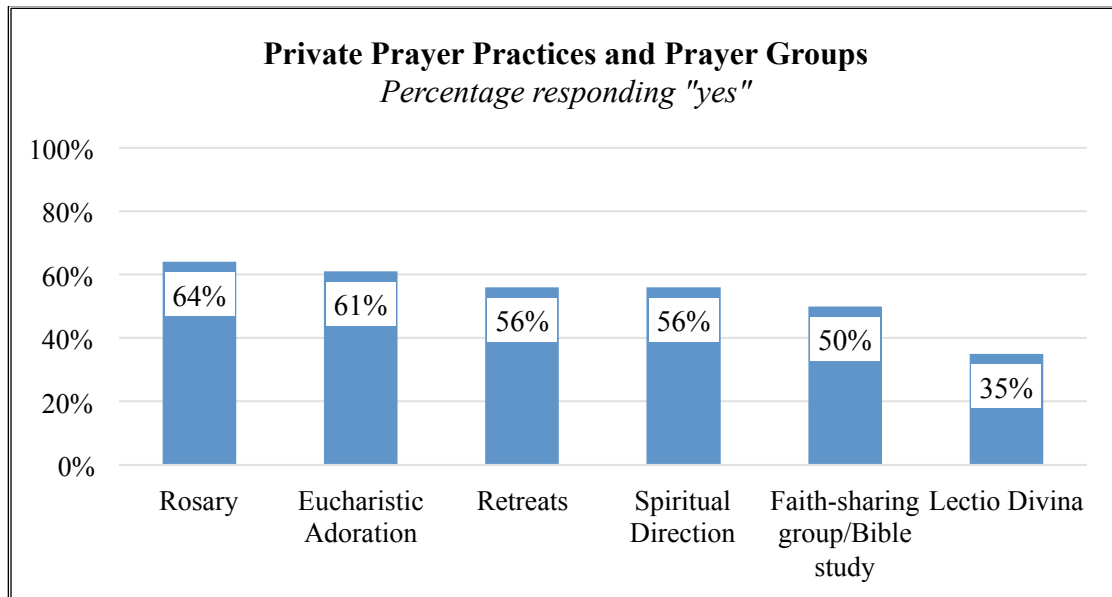
| <b>Participation in Religious Programs or Activities*</b>          |             |              |            |
|--|-------------|--------------|------------|
| <i>Percentage checking each response</i>                           |             |              |            |
|  | <b>Both</b> | <b>Women</b> | <b>Men</b> |
|  | %           | %            | %          |
| Youth ministry or youth group                                      | 44          | 48           | 38         |
| Young adult ministry or group                                      | 24          | 23           | 25         |
| Catholic campus ministry/Newman Center                             | 24          | 23           | 25         |
| World Youth Day  | 16          | 19           | 10         |
| Franciscan University of Steubenville High School Youth Conference | 14          | 19           | 6          |
| National Catholic Youth Conference                                 | 9           | 11           | 6          |
| Religious institute volunteer                                      | 8           | 8            | 8          |
| St. Vincent de Paul Society  | 6           | 5            | 6          |
| Fellowship of Catholic University Students                         | 5           | 7            | 2          |
| National Evangelization Team                                       | 1           | 2            | 0          |
| Catholic Scouting  | —           | **           | 4          |
| Knights of Columbus  | —           | **           | 19         |
| Catholic Daughters   | —           | 3            | ***        |
| Sodality   | —           | 0            | ***        |

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

- Just over two-fifths of respondents (44 percent) participated in youth ministry or youth group. Women were more likely than men to participate in youth ministry or youth group (48 percent compared with 38 percent).
- A quarter (24 percent) participated in a young adult ministry or group or Catholic campus ministry/Newman Center before entering religious life.
- One in six (16 percent) participated in a World Youth Day prior to entering their religious institute. Women were more likely than men to have participated in World Youth Day (19 percent compared with 10 percent).
- Just over one in ten (14 percent) participated in a Franciscan University of Steubenville High School Youth Conference.

## 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. Nine in ten responding religious of the Profession Class of 2019 (91 percent) participated in one or more of these prayer practices or groups on a regular basis prior to entering their religious institute.*



- Rosary and Eucharistic Adoration are the most common types of formative prayer experience, reported by more than six in ten of religious of the Profession Class of 2019.
- Almost six in ten respondents had retreats or spiritual direction prior to entering their religious institute.
- Half (50 percent) regularly participated in a faith-sharing group or a Bible study group.
- Just over a third of respondents (35 percent) 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.*

| <b>Age When First Considered a Vocation to Religious Life</b> |             |              |            |
|---|-------------|--------------|------------|
|   | <b>Age</b>  |              |            |
|   | <b>Both</b> | <b>Women</b> | <b>Men</b> |
| Mean  | 19          | 20           | 18         |
| Median  | 18          | 18           | 18         |
| Range   | 3-50        | 3-50         | 6-34       |

### *Encouragement to Consider a Vocation*

*Almost nine in ten (85 percent) responding religious report that someone encouraged them to consider a vocation to religious life.*

| <b>Encouragement to Consider a Vocation to Religious Life*</b> |             |              |            |
|--|-------------|--------------|------------|
| <i>Percentage checking each response</i>                       |             |              |            |
|  | <b>Both</b> | <b>Women</b> | <b>Men</b> |
|  | %           | %            | %          |
| Friend   | 41          | 42           | 40         |
| Religious sister or brother                                    | 41          | 47           | 33         |
| Parish priest  | 40          | 37           | 44         |
| Parishioner  | 24          | 23           | 25         |
| Other relative   | 22          | 23           | 21         |
| Father   | 17          | 15           | 21         |
| Campus minister/School chaplain                                | 17          | 16           | 19         |
| Mother   | 16          | 13           | 21         |
| Teacher/Catechist  | 13          | 8            | 19         |
| Youth minister   | 11          | 7            | 17         |
| Bishop   | 9           | 8            | 10         |
| Deacon   | 6           | 5            | 8          |

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

- Four in five responding religious say that a friend (41 percent), a parish priest (40 percent), or a religious sister or brother (41 percent) encouraged their vocation.



- One in five reported being encouraged by another relative, a parishioner. One in six respondents reported that they were encouraged by their mother or father. Men are more likely than women to be encouraged by their mother or father.
- 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***

*Just over three-fifths (64 percent) report that they were discouraged from considering a vocation by one or more persons. Women are more likely than men to report being discouraged from discerning a religious vocation (65 percent compared with 58 percent of men).*

| <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   | 38          | 44           | 31         |
| Friend or school classmate   | 34          | 34           | 33         |
| Mother   | 26          | 36           | 13         |
| Father   | 18          | 23           | 13         |
| Colleague or coworker  | 17          | 18           | 17         |
| Teacher  | 9           | 7            | 13         |
| Priest or other clergy   | 7           | 5            | 10         |
| Someone else   | 6           | 7            | 4          |
| Religious sister or brother  | 4           | 7            | 0          |
| Youth minister   | 2           | 2            | 2          |

\*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 (38 percent) a friend or a school classmate (34 percent), or their mother (26 percent), or father (18 percent).
- Women are more likely than men to have been discouraged by their mother (36 percent compared to 13 percent).
- Very few respondents say they were discouraged from considering a vocation by teachers, clergy, a colleague or coworker, 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 five years before they entered.*

| <b>How many years did you know the members of your religious institute before entering?</b> |              |              |            |
|---|--------------|--------------|------------|
|   | <b>Years</b> |              |            |
|   | <b>Both</b>  | <b>Women</b> | <b>Men</b> |
| Mean  | 5            | 6            | 5          |
| Median  | 2            | 2            | 4          |
| Range   | 1-40         | 1-37         | 1-40       |

Half of all responding religious (men and women) report that they knew the members of their religious institute for two years before they entered. More than a third (35 percent) 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. A quarter (26 percent) report that they first became acquainted with their institute through print or online promotional material published by the institute. Women are more likely than men to report being recommended to their religious institute through print or online promotional material published by the institute. Men are more likely than women to report becoming acquainted with their religious institute through one of the sponsored institution or work of the institute

| <b>How did you first become acquainted with your religious institute?*</b>              |             |              |            |
|---|-------------|--------------|------------|
| Percentage checking each response   |             |              |            |
|   | <b>Both</b> | <b>Women</b> | <b>Men</b> |
|   | %           | %            | %          |
| Through print or online promotional material published by the institute                 | 26          | 32           | 19         |
| In/through a sponsored institution or work of the institute<br>(e.g., school, hospital) | 20          | 13           | 29         |
| Through the recommendation of a priest or advisor                                       | 16          | 23           | 8          |
| Through a friend or relative in the institute   | 13          | 11           | 17         |
| Through a vocation matching or placement service  | 7           | 16           | 2          |
| At a vocation event (e.g., Vocation Fair)   | 6           | 7            | 6          |
| Through working with a Sister/Brother from the institute                                | 5           | 3            | 8          |
| Other   | 41          | 44           | 29         |

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

Respondents also indicate that they first became acquainted with their institute through the recommendation of a priest or advisor (16 percent) or a friend or relative in the institute (13 percent).

Two-fifths (41 percent) said they first became acquainted with their religious institute through some other means. Some of those “other” responses included:

- A Nun's Life website
- A walking pilgrimage
- A youth event where I was volunteering with some of our sisters.
- An online search engine
- Attended nursing school together. The sisters were my classmates throughout college
- Attending a Capuchin run parish
- Became member of third order (Lay Dominicans) first
- Came on a Nun Run
- Catholic Volunteer Network
- Come and See week
- Fellowship of Catholic University Students conference
- Friend recommendation
- Friends invited me to come to Mass at the monastery
- I did one semester at a Dominican University, then I asked to join.
- I studied at their seminary
- I was a member back in Nigeria before migrating to the State after the order in 1993
- Internet, but not published by my institute
- Jesuit Volunteered Coups and volunteer work with the Gary and Leshean Family ministry in the Cleveland Diocese
- Lay volunteer program sponsored by the congregation
- Meeting a sister on my college campus
- Mission trip
- Mother & teacher at non-institute school
- My lecturer at College
- National Pastoral Musicians Conference
- Nun run
- One of the few places that had Exposition near me.
- Other friends discerning; at focus conference
- Personal Research
- Praying with them and Mass with the community
- Professor
- Retreat at college hosted by sisters
- Retreat for young women (non-discernment)
- Seminary
- Sisters came to work at my ministry
- Spiritual director
- There were two sisters who were in charge of CCD in the parish.

- Through a relative interested in a sub-division of the institute
- Through public visibility of members- scholars & activists
- Through the recommendation of a college friend
- University chaplaincy retreat
- Visiting the sisters who lived and worked near the college I attended.
- Website, visiting, and female religious sister
- Went to school with one of the Sisters

## Vocation/Discernment Programs and Experiences

*Among the vocation programs and experiences about which they were asked, respondents are most likely to have participated in a “Come and See” experience. Most (87 percent) had participated in at least one of these programs or experiences prior to entering 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                             | 67          | 63           | 73         |
| Vocation retreat                                      | 45          | 53           | 33         |
| Live-in experience                                    | 29          | 29           | 29         |
| “Nun Run”   | —           | 7            | ***        |
| “Andrew Dinner”                                       | —           | **           | 2          |
| Other   | 7           |              |            |

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

- “Come and See” experiences are a popular vocation program, experienced by two-thirds of the respondents (67 percent) before they entered their religious institute.
- Half of responding religious (45 percent) participated in a vocation retreat before entering their religious institute. Women are more likely than men to have participated in a vocation retreat (53 percent compared to 33 percent of men).
- Three-tenths (29 percent) 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 2 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:

- Discernment Small Group
- Frequented house of institute as candidate
- Personal visit
- Rebuild my Church
- Retreat directed by sister of the institution
- Volunteer live in
- Volunteer program

**Appendix: Questionnaire with Response Frequencies**



**Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**



**Profession Class of 2019 National Survey**

This survey will help us to understand the characteristics of the women professing perpetual vows in religious life in 2019. 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:

---

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

---

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

4. Are you:    44 Male    56 Female

5. Your country of birth: USA: 74 \_\_\_\_\_

26 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): NR = 1

68 Caucasian/European American/white

8 African/African American/black

10 Hispanic/Latina

9 Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian/Middle Eastern

0 Native American/Alaska Native

3 Mixed race

2 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. How long have you been a Catholic?

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

13 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?

80 Both parents Catholic

6 Mother Catholic, father non-Catholic

10 Neither parent was Catholic

4 Father Catholic, mother non-Catholic

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



10. What is your birth order?  
 4 Only child      37 Eldest      33 Youngest      26 Somewhere in the middle
11. Do (did) you have a relative who is a priest or a religious?      27 Yes      73 No
12. Did you attend any of the following before you entered your religious institute? (Please check all that apply):  
 54 Parish-based religious education/CCD/RCIA      42 Catholic college or university  
 50 Catholic elementary or middle school      13 Catholic ministry formation program  
 38 Catholic high school
13. Were you ever home schooled?      16 Yes      84 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?  
 1 Elementary school (K-8)      49 College or university undergraduate degree  
 14 High school      25 Graduate degree  
 2 Trade or technical school  
 10 Some college, but not a Bachelor's degree
15. Did educational debt delay your application for entrance to your institute?      8 Yes      92 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)  
 6 Family members      2 Mater Ecclesiae Fund for Vocations  
 4 Parish      1 The Labouré Society  
 4 Religious community      0 Serra Fund for Vocations  
 3 Friends/co-workers      1 Knights of Columbus Fund for Vocations
16. Were you employed before entering your religious institute?  
 16 No      26 Yes, part-time      58 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? NR = 3  
 17 No      64 Yes, as a volunteer      12 Yes, part-time      8 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      15 Teacher in a Catholic school  
 42 Extraordinary Minister of Communion      6 Hospital or prison ministry  
 51 Lector      31 Social service ministry (e.g., Catholic Charities program, other community service)  
 30 Music ministry, cantor, choir  
 37 Faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA      37 Youth minister or Campus minister

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

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 4 Catholic Scouting (if male)   | 9 National Catholic Youth Conference  |
| 3 Catholic Daughters (if female)                                      | 1 National Evangelization Team (NET)  |
| 24 Catholic campus ministry/Newman Center                             | 8 Religious institute volunteer (e.g., Mercy Volunteer Corps or Jesuit Volunteer Corps) |
| 5 Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS)                  | 6 St. Vincent de Paul Society   |
| 14 Franciscan University of Steubenville High School Youth Conference | 16 World Youth Day  |
| 19 Knights of Columbus (if male)                                      | 24 Young adult ministry or group  |
| 0 Sodality (if female)  | 44 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)

- |                          |                                    |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 61 Eucharistic Adoration | 50 Faith-sharing group/Bible study |
| 64 Rosary                | 56 Retreats                        |
| 35 Lectio Divina         | 56 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)

- |                   |                                    |                                |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 16 Mother         | 24 Parishioner                     | 9 Bishop                       |
| 17 Father         | 13 Teacher/Catechist               | 40 Parish Priest               |
| 22 Other relative | 11 Youth Minister                  | 41 Religious sister or brother |
| 41 Friend         | 17 Campus Minister/School Chaplain | 6 Deacon                       |

23. Did anyone discourage you from considering religious life as a vocation?

NR = 4    64 Yes    36 No

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

- |                               |                               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 26 Mother                     | 34 Friend or school classmate |
| 18 Father                     | 9 Teacher                     |
| 38 Other relative             | 2 Youth minister              |
| 7 Priest or other clergy      | 17 Colleague or coworker      |
| 4 Religious sister or brother |                               |
| 6 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)

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

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

2 “Andrew Dinner” (if male)

7 “Nun Run” (if female)

67 “Come and See” experience

7 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

45 Vocation retreat

29 Live-in experience

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 2019 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 2019 webpage.

68 Yes 32 No

(Please see the USCCB webpage at <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/consecrated-life/profession-class/> for an example of how this information will be displayed.)

**You are invited to send an individual photo (a clear headshot) in digital format to: [clergy@usccb.org](mailto:clergy@usccb.org). Please include your name and the name of your religious institute. The USCCB must receive your photo no later than 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 Ralph O’Donnell, Director  
USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations

© CARA, 2019

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University

2300 Wisconsin Avenue, NW, Suite 400A, Washington, DC 20007

Phone 202.687.8080 FAX 202.687.8083 E-mail [cara@georgetown.edu](mailto:cara@georgetown.edu)