**Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate**
**Georgetown University**
**Washington, D.C.**

# *The Influence of College Experiences on Women's Vocational Discernment to Religious Life*

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## Executive Summary

In fall 2014, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University asked major superiors of institutes of women religious in the United States for contact information for entering, newly professed, and recent vocations to their institutes in the United States. These superiors identified 209 new entrants, 114 newly professed, and more than 1,000 perpetually professed women who had entered religious life since 2000. CARA contacted these women and invited them to participate in a survey of their experiences in college before entering their institute and the impact these experiences may have had on their vocational discernment.

## Major Findings

### *Demographics and Background*

- Forty-one percent of respondents have professed their final/perpetual vows and 32 percent have professed temporary vows. Fourteen percent are novices and 13 percent are candidates/postulants.

- On average, respondents entered their institute in 2007, professed temporary vows in 2008 and professed perpetual vows in 2014.

- The average age of respondents is 37. The average candidate or postulant is 30 as are novices. Those who have professed temporary vows average age 34 and those who have professed final or perpetual vows are age 43, on average.

- Eight in ten respondents were born in the United States (79 percent). Nine percent were born in Asia or Oceania. Six percent were born in Canada or Europe. Five percent were born in Latin America or the Caribbean and 1 percent in Africa.

- Most respondents were Catholic from infancy (87 percent). Only six percent converted to Catholicism as an adult. Seven percent became Catholic as a child or teen. Eighty-two percent indicate that, in their teens, both of their parents were Catholic and 11 percent had one Catholic parent. Seven percent said neither of their parents were Catholic.

minister. Of those reporting this, 62 percent indicated that a priest or religious professor had a significant positive influence on their vocational discernment and 46 percent said the same regarding a priest or religious campus minister.

- Those who attended public or non-Catholic private colleges were less likely to have a priest or religious professor (8 percent) but many did have a priest or religious campus minister (45 percent). Those attending non-Catholic campuses with a priest or religious professor or campus minister were less likely than those attending Catholic colleges or universities to say these individuals had a significant positive influence on their vocational discernment. Thirteen percent indicated a priest or religious professor had this impact and 27 percent said a priest or religious campus minister did so.

- Sixty-one percent of those attending Catholic colleges said that contact with a priest, sister, or brother was "very" important to their vocational discernment in college. By comparison, only 42 percent of those attending other campuses responded as such.

- Most did not have members of their religious institute on their college campuses. Twenty percent of those attending a Catholic college reported this as did 6 percent of those attending other campuses.

- Respondents reported similar frequencies of Mass attendance in college as in high school. While in college, 87 percent attended Mass at least once a week with only 6 percent saying they "seldom or never" attended Mass. Three percent attended less than weekly, but at least once a month and 4 percent attended a few times a year. Those attending Catholic colleges were substantially more likely than those on non-Catholic campuses to attend Mass more than once a week (85 percent compared to 55 percent).

- Those attending Catholic colleges were most likely to go to Mass on campus in a chapel (78 percent). Those attending non-Catholic campuses were most likely to go to a local parish (49 percent) or a Newman Center (38 percent).

- Sixty-seven percent of those attending a Catholic college said that their college participation in Mass had "very much" influence on their vocational discernment. Forty-five percent of those attending non-Catholic colleges responded as such.

- Overall, 71 percent of respondents participated in retreats during college (86 percent at Catholic colleges compared to 63 percent at non-Catholic colleges) and respondents typically took part in three to five of these. These were most often sponsored by campus ministry. Nine in ten evaluate these retreats as "good" or "excellent" and four in ten (41 percent) said that these had "very much" influence on their vocational discernment.

- Thirty-one percent had a spiritual director in college (44 percent at Catholic colleges compared to 24 percent at non-Catholic colleges). Most often respondents met with their spiritual director monthly (63 percent) and this person was most often a priest (73 percent). Seven in ten of those with a spiritual director (69 percent) said that they had "very much" influence on their vocational discernment.

- Sixty percent of respondents participated in a college service program (76 percent at Catholic colleges compared to 51 percent at non-Catholic colleges). Forty percent of these respondents went on an "Alternative Spring Break" and 30 percent were involved in a summer service program. Most of these programs included reflection or prayer (71 percent). Eighty-four percent evaluated their service program as "good" or "excellent" and 22 percent said the experience had "very much" influence on their vocational discernment.

- Ninety-one percent of those attending a Catholic college were aware of a campus ministry program on campus. By comparison only 69 percent of those attending other campuses were aware of this being available on campus. Six in ten reported involvement in campus ministry programs (76 percent at Catholic colleges compared to 49 percent at non-Catholic colleges). About a quarter (23 percent) said campus ministry programs were "very much" important to their vocational discernment.

- Respondents shared their vocational discernment in college with three to four close friends, on average, while in college. One in five said that their close friends had "very much" influence on their vocational discernment in college. Among respondents attending a Catholic college, 71 percent said that their close friends were "very" supportive of their vocational choice. By comparison, only 42 percent of those at non-Catholic campuses responded as such.

- Sixty-five percent of those attending Catholic colleges participated in "Come & See' events or a "live-in" experience with a religious order. Those attending other colleges were less likely to ever do so (38 percent). Among those who did participate, 72 percent said that these had "very much" influence on their vocational discernment.

- Only 10 percent ever participated in a "Nun Run" in college. However, among those who did, 48 percent said this had "very much" influence on their vocational discernment.

- One in five participated in a vocational discernment group while in college (19 percent). This was more common among those at Catholic colleges than those attending elsewhere (31 percent compared to 12 percent). Those attending a non-Catholic college were more likely than those on Catholic campuses to say these had "very much" influence on their vocational discernment (39 percent compared to 29 percent).

- Among those attending Catholic colleges, the most common forms of devotional or spiritual practices were Eucharistic adoration (62 percent participating weekly), praying the rosary (55 percent), Liturgy of the Hours (42 percent), Scripture meditation (42 percent), faith sharing (28 percent), and group Bible study (17 percent). Among these respondents, the most influential of these for vocational discernment were Eucharistic Adoration (73 percent "very much" influence), Scripture meditation (35 percent), and praying the rosary (33 percent).

- Among those attending non-Catholic colleges, the most common forms of devotional or spiritual practices were praying the rosary (45 percent), Eucharistic adoration (36 percent participating weekly), Scripture meditation (33 percent), Liturgy of the Hours (25 percent), faith sharing (19 percent), and group Bible study (17 percent). Among these respondents, the most influential of these for vocational discernment were: Eucharistic Adoration (54 percent "very much" influence), Scripture meditation (33 percent), and praying the rosary (32 percent).

- Six in ten respondents indicated that they discussed faith, religion, or prayer "periodically" or more often with other students outside of class (60 percent). Less commonly they indicated discussing this with the same frequency in class (35 percent) or with professors outside of class (24 percent). Respondents who attended Catholic colleges and universities were significantly more likely than those attending non-Catholic campuses to report at least periodic discussion about faith, religion, or prayer in class (76 percent compared to 12 percent), with students outside of class (83 percent compared to 47 percent), and with professors outside of class (48 percent compared to 10 percent).

- A majority of respondents at Catholic colleges said that someone in college directed them to consider a specific religious community. Of these, 64 percent ended up joining the community recommended to them. Those attending non-Catholic colleges were less likely to be directed to a specific community (20 percent), but among those who were, the same share ended up joining that community (64 percent).

- Those attend ending Catholic colleges recall being encouraged to pursue a vocation more by friends and college staff than those on other campuses. The most common encouragers were friends (73 percent), religious sisters (72 percent), professors (46 percent) and campus ministers (45 percent). Those attending non-Catholic colleges were most likely to be encouraged by friends (46 percent), religious sisters (45 percent), parish priests (39 percent), and campus ministers (28 percent).

- Discouragement from seeking a vocation most often came from parents (33 percent of those attending a Catholic college and 21 percent of those on other campuses). Friends (26 percent and 20 percent, respectively) and siblings (22 percent and 17 percent respectively) were also common discouragers.

# Introduction

In fall 2014, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University received funding from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation for a study of the influence of college experiences on women's vocational discernment to religious life. This study followed from a similar study of the college experiences of men who pursued priesthood and/or religious life that CARA conducted in 2012. The college years are a significant time in vocational decision-making for an individual and the research explored some of the factors and influences at play during those years, both encouraging and discouraging vocational discernment. The analysis presented here pays particular attention to the ways in which the activities and experiences of women who attended Catholic colleges and universities are similar to, or different from, those of women who attended non-Catholic colleges and universities.

CARA designed a six-page, 105-question survey for this study that included many of the questions originally asked in the 2012 study. The questionnaire asked respondents about the nature of their contact with priests and religious men and women while in college, their college coursework and the nature and frequency of their involvement with campus ministry, vocational discernment programs, and/or Catholic parishes both on and off campus. It also inquired into their religious practice during college, including the nature and frequency of prayer, Mass attendance, devotional practices, retreats, and spiritual direction. Finally, the questionnaire asked about their service activities in college, their peer friendships, the overall religious atmosphere of their college, and their involvement in residential life and social activities on campus. After reporting on each of these topics, the questionnaire asked respondents to evaluate the influence that each had on their own vocational discernment. It also asked respondents about their personal background characteristics and their reasons for deciding to attend the college they attended.

To obtain the names of women who have entered religious life in recent years, CARA asked major superiors of institutes of women religious in the United States for contact information for those entering, newly professed, and recent vocations to their institutes in the United States. These superiors identified 209 new entrants, 114 newly professed, and more than 1,000 perpetually professed women who had entered religious life in their institutes since 2000.

CARA contacted more than 1,400 women religious in January 2015, either by email or by mail in cases where there was no working email and invited them to participate in a survey of their experiences in college before entering their institute and the impact these experiences may have had on their vocational discernment. A little more than 1,100 women were invited to the survey via an emailed invitation and more than 300 were sent a mailed invitation to the survey. The survey was available both online and as a pdf for those who preferred to complete a paper survey. CARA followed up with non-respondents by email through January and February 2015. By March 1, CARA had received completed surveys from 883 women, for a response rate of approximately 63 percent. A total of 259 surveys were completed on paper and 624 were completed online. All surveys were entered into the dataset used for this analysis.

## Organization of the Report

This report is divided into three main parts:

- Part I provides a summary of the characteristics of survey respondents. This summary includes the characteristics of all respondents, including those who did not attend college or university before entering their religious institute. However, because the intent of this report is to determine what aspects of the college experience may have influenced women to enter religious life, CARA removed from the analyses presented in Parts II and III the 95 respondents who report that they did not attend a college or university before entering religious life.

- Part II explores the ways in which attending a Catholic college may have fostered the vocational discernment of the women in the sample. Specifically, it examines how the activities and experiences of men who attended a Catholic college for all or most of their college years are different from those of women who attended a non-Catholic college (i.e., public or non-Catholic private college) for all or most of their college years. Throughout this report, those who attended a Catholic college for all or most of their college years are referred to as having attended a Catholic college (or "Catholic college attenders"), and those who attended a public or private, non-Catholic college for all or most of their college years are referred to as having attended a non-Catholic college (or "non-Catholic college attenders").

- Part III summarizes the various college activities and experiences that were noted by respondents as being most important or influential to their vocational discernment.

## Interpreting this Report

Many of the questions on the survey use four-point response scales (for example, "not at all," "a little," "some," and "very much" or "no influence," "a little influence," "some influence," and "very much influence"). Tables summarizing responses to questions that use these scales usually will not include percentages for each response category. Instead, they will usually report the percentage of those who responded in the most positive category (e.g., "very much influence"), since the most positive response sometimes distinguishes important contrasts in level of support. This is especially useful for this survey since many respondents tended to give "positive" responses but not always the most positive responses.

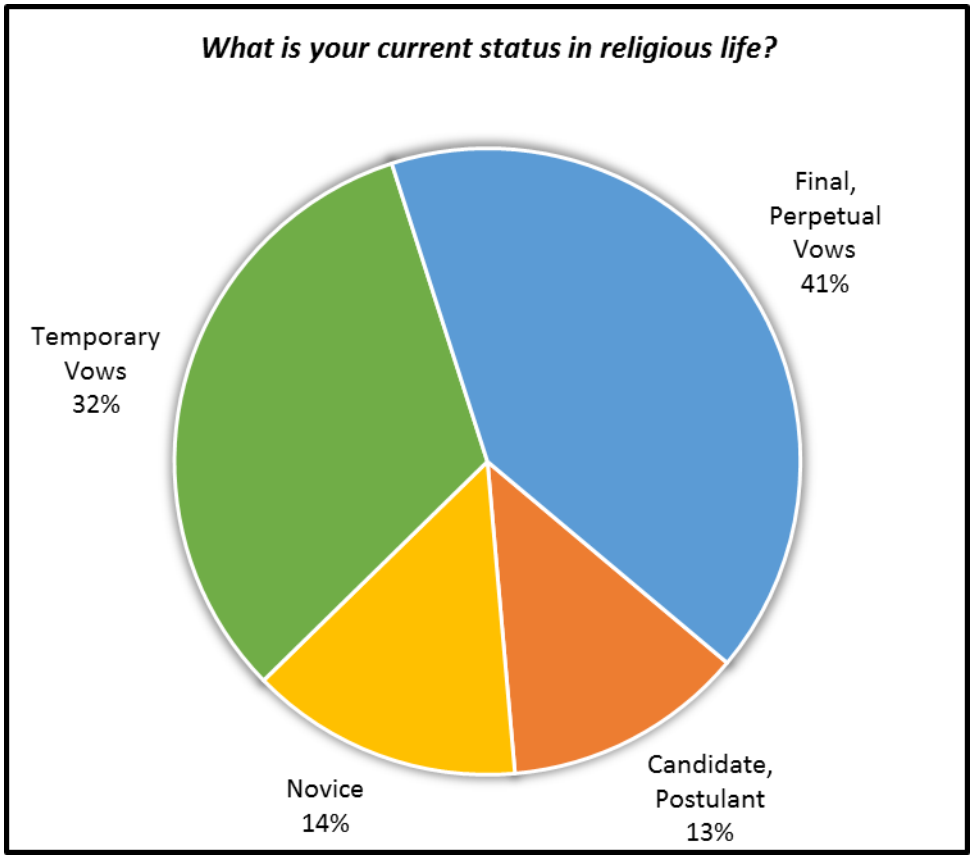
In general, in making comparisons between those who attended Catholic colleges and those who attended non-Catholic colleges, tables will show the percentage of each subgroup who responded in the most positive category. Whenever the difference in percentages between these groups approaches or exceeds 10 percent, this difference is considered notable or important.

# Part I: Characteristics of Respondents

This section of the report describes the characteristics of all survey respondents, including those who did not attend college or university prior to entering their religious institute.

## Status in Religious Life

Forty-one percent of respondents have professed their final/perpetual vows and 32 percent have professed temporary vows. Fourteen percent are novices and 13 percent are candidates/postulants.



## Year of Entry and Profession of Vows

On average, respondents entered their institute in 2007. The average year for professing temporary vows, among those who have done so, is 2008. The average year of profession of perpetual vows among these respondents was 2014. However, 44 percent of respondents anticipate professing perpetual vows after 2015. Among those who professed perpetual vows in 2015 or earlier, the average year for professing perpetual vows is 2010.

**Year of Entry and Profession of Vows**
Percentage in each category:

| | **Entered institute** | **Professed temporary vows** | **Professed or expect to profess perpetual vows** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Before 1990 | 2% | 2% | 1% |
| 1990 to 1999 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| 2000 to 2009 | 54 | 52 | 17 |
| 2010 to 2015 | 40 | 43 | 37 |
| After 2015 | -- | 1 | 44 |
| Average year: | 2007 | 2008 | 2014 |

## Age Distribution

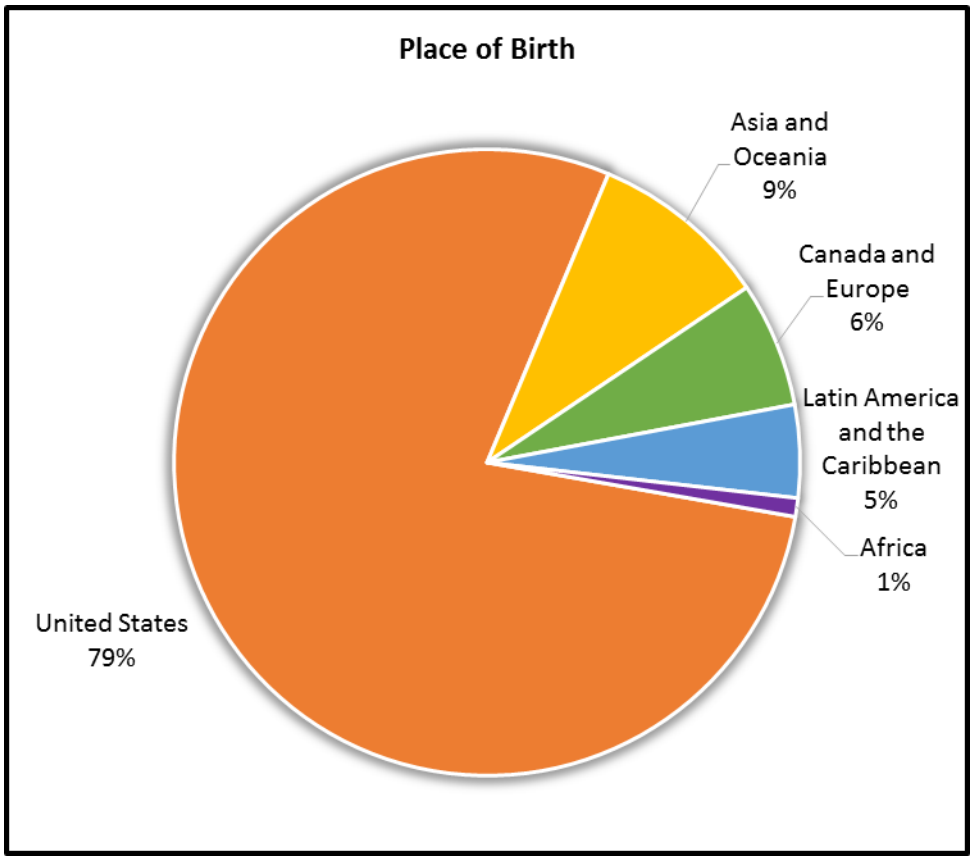
The average age among all respondents is 37. Candidates, postulants, and novices are younger, with an average age of 30. Respondents who have professed temporary vows average 34 years of age and those who have professed final/perpetual vows, average 43 years of age.

**Age Distribution of Respondents**
Percentage in each category:

| | All | Candidate, Postulant | Novice | Temporary Vows | Final, Perpetual Vows |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Under age 20 | 1% | 4% | 1% | 0% | 0% |
| 20 to 24 | 10 | 26 | 30 | 7 | 0 |
| 25 to 29 | 21 | 40 | 33 | 28 | 5 |
| 30 to 34 | 24 | 14 | 14 | 31 | 24 |
| 35 to 39 | 15 | 4 | 8 | 14 | 22 |
| 40 to 44 | 8 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 13 |
| 45 to 49 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 9 |
| 50 to 54 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 8 |
| 55 to 59 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| 60 to 64 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 5 |
| 65 and older | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 8 |
| Average age: | 37 | 30 | 30 | 34 | 43 |

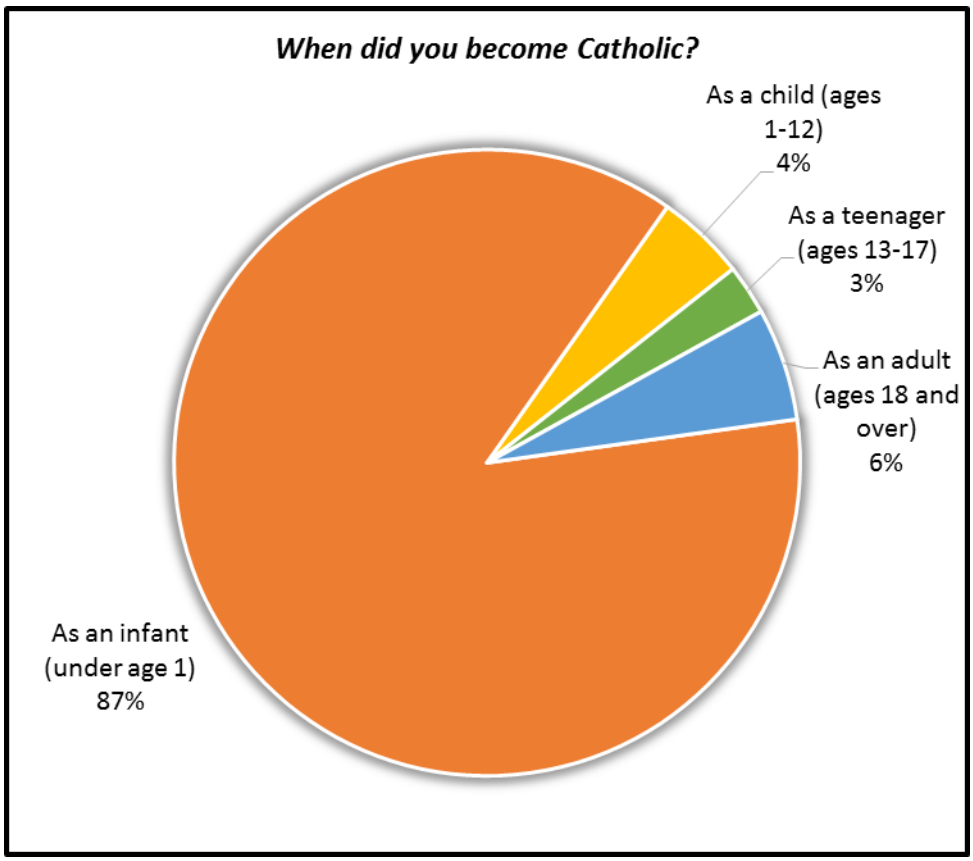
## Place of Birth

About eight in ten respondents were born in the United States (79 percent). Nearly one in ten were born in a nation in Asia or Oceania (9 percent). Six percent were born in Canada or in a European nation. Five percent were born in a Latin American or Caribbean nation and 1 percent were born in Africa.



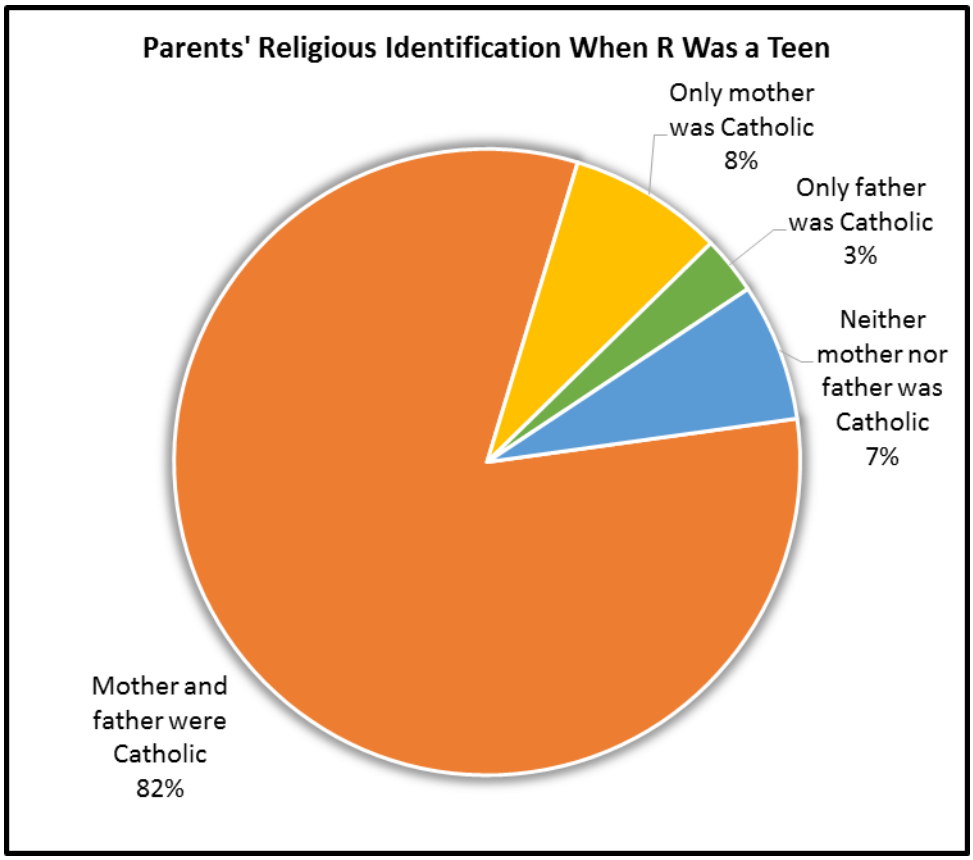
## Age of Becoming Catholic

Most respondents entered the Catholic Church through infant baptism (87 percent). Four percent entered the Catholic Church as a child (ages 1 to 12), 3 percent as a teen, and 6 percent as an adult.



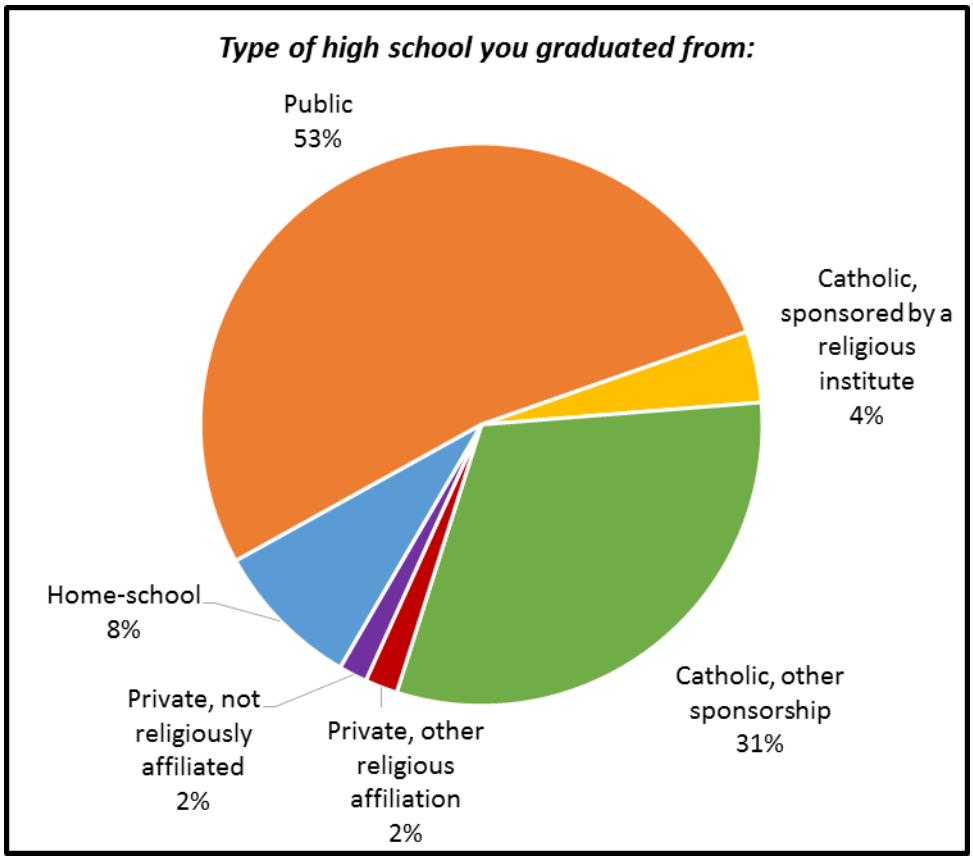
## Parents' Religious Identification

More than eight in ten respondents indicate that when they were a teen both of their parents were Catholic (82 percent). Eight percent indicate only their mother was Catholic when they were a teen and 3 percent indicate only their father was Catholic at this time. Seven percent say that when they were a teen neither of their parents was Catholic.



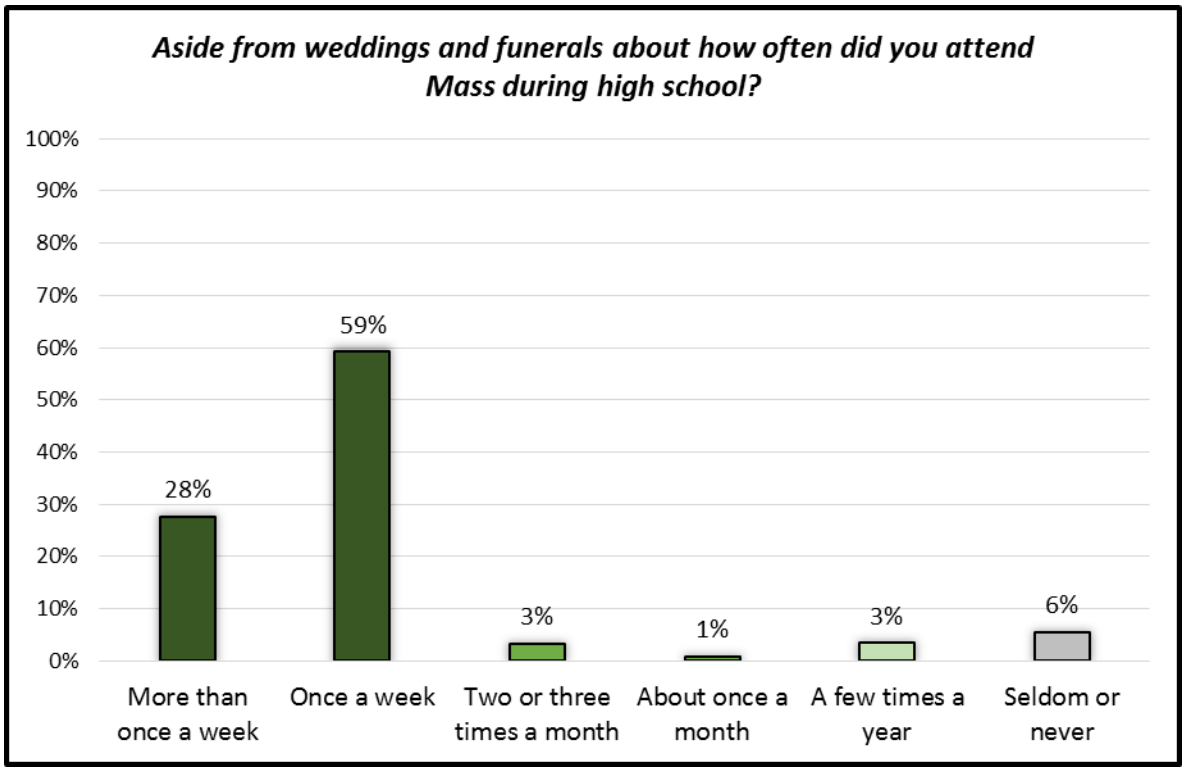
## Type of High School Attended

A majority of respondents attended a public high school (53 percent). More than a third attended a Catholic high school (4 percent sponsored by a religious institute and 31 percent sponsored by another Catholic institution, such as a diocese or a parish). Eight percent were home-schooled. Four percent attended private, non-Catholic high schools.



## Mass Attendance during High School

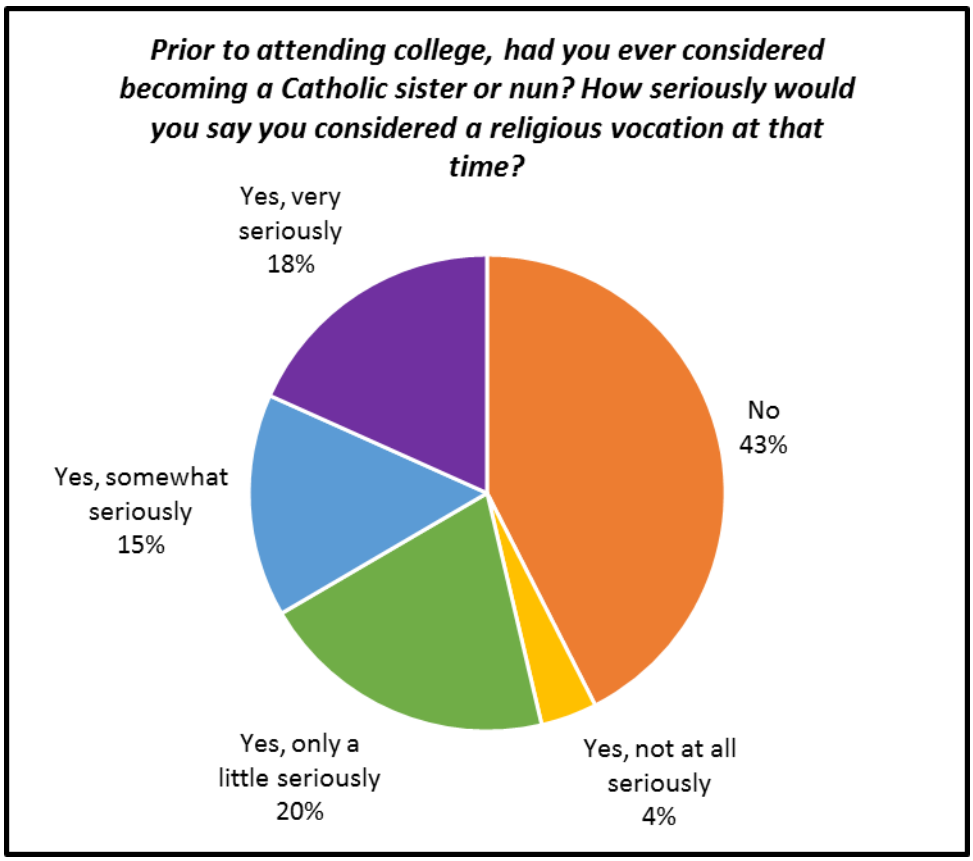
Eighty-seven percent of respondents attended Mass at least once a week while in high school with many attending more than weekly (28 percent).[1] Only six percent say they "seldom or never" attended Mass while in high school. Seven percent attended Mass less than weekly but at least a few times a year.




[1] This would not be unusual for students attending Mass at some point during the week at a Catholic school and then with their families on weekends.

## Consideration of a Vocation Prior to College

Fifty-seven percent of respondents considered becoming a Catholic religious sister or nun prior to attending college. A third said they considered this "somewhat seriously" or "very seriously."



## College Information

Nine in ten respondents attended college prior to entering their religious institute (89 percent). Most respondents entered and graduated from college in the 2000s (51 percent and 61 percent, respectively). Half attended public colleges or universities. More than a third attended a Catholic college or university (36 percent). Fifteen percent attended a non-Catholic private college or university.

**College Information**

| | |
|---|---|
| Attended college or university prior to entering institute | 89% |
| | |
| First entered college (of those who attended): | |
| Before 1970 | 3% |
| 1970 to 1979 | 7 |
| 1980 to 1989 | 11 |
| 1990 to 1999 | 28 |
| 2000 to 2009 | 46 |
| 2010 or later | 5 |
| | |
| Year graduated or last attended (of those who attended): | |
| Before 1970 | 1% |
| 1970 to 1979 | 4 |
| 1980 to 1989 | 9 |
| 1990 to 1999 | 16 |
| 2000 to 2009 | 49 |
| 2010 or later | 12 |
| | |
| Type of College (of those who attended): | |
| Public | 49% |
| Catholic | 36 |
| Private, other religious affiliation | 6 |
| Private, not religiously affiliated | 9 |

The table on the next page lists the colleges in which the greatest numbers of respondents reported attending. The top five are: Franciscan University of Steubenville (59 respondents), Benedictine College (15 respondents), Catholic University of America (15 respondents), Christendom College (13 percent), and University of Dallas (11 percent).

**University or College Attended the Longest**
Campuses attended by five or more respondents

| | |
|---|---|
| Franciscan University of Steubenville | 59 |
| Benedictine College | 15 |
| Catholic University of America | 15 |
| Christendom College | 13 |
| University of Dallas | 11 |
| University of Nebraska-Lincoln | 10 |
| University of St. Thomas | 9 |
| University of Notre Dame | 8 |
| Boston College | 6 |
| Indiana University | 6 |
| Providence College | 6 |
| Florida State University | 5 |
| George Mason University | 5 |
| Lamar University | 5 |
| Purdue University | 5 |
| University of California, Berkeley | 5 |
| University of Virginia | 5 |

Note: A total of 464 campuses were named. Collectively, those listed above were attended by 25 percent of all respondents.

## Part II: College Activities and Experiences

This part of the report describes the college activities and experiences reported by respondents who had varying levels of exposure to Catholic college environments. Specifically, it explores the ways in which the activities and experiences of women who attended Catholic colleges for all or most of their college years differ from those of women who attended non-Catholic colleges for all or most of their college years. This section reports differences in their exposure to priests and religious on the faculty, administration or staff, and campus ministry teams of their colleges; their access to and participation in Mass, retreats, service, and campus ministry programs; their exposure to an atmosphere of respect for the discussion and practice of faith and prayer both inside and outside of the classroom; and their participation in college courses that reportedly had an influence on their vocational discernment.

In this part of the report, the 95 respondents who reported they did not attend college or university prior to entering their religious institute (11 percent of all respondents) are excluded from the analyses. All tables and figures below present analyses of the responses from those who attended college or university prior to entering their religious institute.

## Faculty and Campus Ministers

Among all respondents who attended college before entering their institute, 35 percent reported that they had a professor who was a priest, religious sister, or religious brother. Additionally, 59 percent reported they had a campus minister(s) who were a priest, religious sister, or religious brother.

More than eight in ten who attended a Catholic college or university had professors and/or campus ministers who were a priest, religious sister, or religious brother (83 percent and 84 percent, respectively). Among those who attended a non-Catholic college, it is more common for respondents to report that they had a campus minister(s) rather than a professor who was a priest, religious sister, or religious brother (45 percent and 8 percent, respectively).

**Faculty and Campus Ministers**

| | | Type of College | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Catholic** | **Non-Catholic** |
| Had a professor(s) in college who was a priest, sister, or, brother | 35% | 83% | 8% |
| If R had such professors: | | | |
| Respondents reporting a professor had a significant positive influence on their vocational discernment: | 29% | 62% | 13% |
| Had a campus minister(s) in college who was a priest, sister, or, brother | 59% | 84% | 45% |
| If R had such campus minister(s): | | | |
| Respondents reporting a campus minister had a significant positive influence on their vocational discernment: | 33% | 46% | 27% |

Overall, 29 percent of those who had a priest, religious sister, or religious brother as a professor say this person had a significant positive influence on their vocational discernment. This is more common among those who attended a Catholic college or university than other campuses (62 percent compared to 13 percent). A third of those who had a priest, religious sister, or religious brother as a campus minister say this person had a significant positive influence on their vocational discernment. This is more common among those who attended a Catholic college or university than other campuses (46 percent compared to 27 percent).

## Importance of Contact with Priest, Sister or Brother for Discernment

Half of respondents indicate that contact with a priest, sister, or brother was "very important" to their vocational discernment during college. This level of importance was reported more often by those who attended Catholic colleges and universities than those attending other campuses (61 percent compared to 42 percent).

**How important was contact with a priest, sister, or brother on your vocational discernment during college?**

| | | Type of College | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Catholic** | **Non-Catholic** |
| Not at all | 21% | 8% | 30% |
| Only a little important | 10 | 8 | 12 |
| Some important | 19 | 23 | 16 |
| Very much important | 50 | 61 | 42 |

Only 21 percent indicate contact with a priest, sister, or brother was "not at all important" to their vocational discernment during college. However, respondents who attended non-Catholic colleges or universities were more likely to report this than those attending Catholic institutions (30 percent compared to 8 percent).

### *Members of Religious Institute on Campus*

Overall, 11 percent of respondents indicated that members of their religious institute were on their college campus. This is more common among those who attended a Catholic college or university than a non-Catholic campus (20 percent compared to 6 percent).

**Were any members of your religious institute in ministry on your college campus**?

| | | Type of College | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Catholic** | **Non-Catholic** |
| Yes | 11% | 20% | 6% |
| No | 89 | 80 | 94 |

## Mass Attendance during College

Eighty-seven percent of respondents indicate they attended Mass at least once a week during college. Weekly Mass attendance was more common among those attending a Catholic college (97 percent compared to 82 percent). Majorities of respondents report attending Mass more than once a week, whether they attended a Catholic college or not.

**How often did you attend Mass during college?**

| | | Type of College | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Catholic** | **Non-Catholic** |
| More than once a week | 65% | 85% | 55% |
| Once a week | 22 | 12 | 27 |
| Two or three times a month | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| About once a month | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| A few times a year | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Seldom or never | 6 | <1 | 8 |

Seventy-eight percent of those attending a Catholic college or university usually attended Mass at a campus chapel. Thirty-eight percent of those attending a non-Catholic campus usually attended at a Newman Center. Local parishes were usually attended by 10 percent of those going to a Catholic college and 49 percent of those who went to non-Catholic colleges. Among the "other" locations (12 percent of all respondents) noted were their parishes back home (i.e., away from college), a nearby abbey or monastery, a shrine or cathedral, or they attended services at a Protestant church.

**During college, where did you usually attend Mass?**

| | | Type of College | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Catholic** | **Non-Catholic** |
| Newman Center or campus chapel | 53% | 78% | 38% |
| Local parish | 35 | 10 | 49 |
| Other | 12 | 12 | 13 |

As shown in the table on the next page, more than half of respondents (53 percent) indicate that Mass participation was "very important" to their vocational discernment during college. This level of importance was reported more often by those who attended Catholic colleges and universities than those attending other campuses (67 percent compared to 45 percent).

**What influence did your participation in Mass during college have on your vocational discernment?**

| | | Type of College | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Catholic** | **Non-Catholic** |
| None at all | 17% | 8% | 22% |
| Only a little influence | 9 | 6 | 10 |
| Some influence | 21 | 19 | 23 |
| Very much influence | 53 | 67 | 45 |

Only 17 percent indicate Mass participation was "not at all important" to their vocational discernment during college. However, respondents who attended non-Catholic colleges or universities were more likely to report this than those attending Catholic institutions (22 percent compared to 8 percent).

## College Retreats

Seventy-one percent of respondents attended at least one retreat during college. This was reported more often by those who attended Catholic colleges and universities than those attending other campuses (86 percent compared to 63 percent).

**College Retreats**

| | | Type of College | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Catholic** | **Non-Catholic** |
| Participated in retreat(s) in college | 71% | 86% | 63% |
| If R participated in retreats: | | | |
| Participated in a one-day retreat | 63% | 67% | 60% |
| Sponsored by… | | | |
| Campus ministry | 58% | 63% | 54% |
| Diocese | 8 | 4 | 12 |
| Religious order | 21 | 24 | 19 |
| Other | 12 | 9 | 15 |
| Participated in a weekend or five-day retreat | 91% | 92% | 90% |
| Sponsored by… | | | |
| Campus ministry | 49% | 54% | 45% |
| Diocese | 7 | 1 | 11 |
| Religious order | 28 | 31 | 27 |
| Other | 16 | 14 | 18 |
| Spiritual direction was available during retreats | 59% | 63% | 57% |
| Retreat was presented as "vocational discernment retreat" | 47% | 51% | 44% |
| Sponsored by… | | | |
| Campus ministry | 6% | 7% | 6% |
| Diocese | 6 | 2 | 8 |
| Religious order | 84 | 89 | 79 |
| Other | 4 | 2 | 7 |

Among those who participated in retreats, more attended a weekend or five-day retreat than a one-day retreat (91 percent compared to 63 percent). This is the same whether the respondent attended a Catholic college or not.

Most retreats attended by respondents were sponsored by campus ministry although some were also sponsored by a religious order. Few were sponsored by dioceses or other groups. Six in ten report that spiritual direction was available on retreats they went on (59 percent).

Nearly half reported going on a retreat that was presented as a "vocational discernment retreat" (47 percent). Of those who reported this, 87 percent indicate this retreat was sponsored by a religious order. Respondents who attended a Catholic college were slightly more likely than others to report that they went on a "vocational discernment retreat" (51 percent compared to 44 percent).

**College Retreats, Continued**

| | | Type of College | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Catholic** | **Non-Catholic** |
| Participated in retreat(s) in college | 71% | 86% | 63% |
| If R participated in retreats: | | | |
| Participated in an online retreat experience | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| Number of college retreats participated in: | | | |
| One | 8% | 6% | 9% |
| Two | 15 | 14 | 16 |
| Three to five | 43 | 43 | 42 |
| Six to nine | 21 | 22 | 20 |
| Ten or more | 13 | 15 | 13 |
| Evaluation of college retreats: | | | |
| Poor | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| Fair | 10 | 12 | 9 |
| Good | 45 | 47 | 44 |
| Excellent | 44 | 40 | 46 |
| What influence did the retreat experience(s) have on your vocational discernment? | | | |
| None at all | 8% | 6% | 9% |
| Only a little influence | 16 | 17 | 15 |
| Some influence | 35 | 37 | 33 |
| Very much influence | 41 | 40 | 43 |

Very few respondents report participation in an online retreat experience (1 percent).

Most respondents who participated in retreats indicate they attended three to five retreats during college (43 percent). One in five participated in six to nine retreats (21 percent). Most who went on retreats during college evaluate these as good (44 percent) or excellent (45 percent). There are not significant differences between respondents by type of college in terms of the number of retreats they attended or the evaluation of these experiences.

Four in ten respondents (41 percent) indicate that college retreat experiences were "very important" to their vocational discernment. Only 8 percent indicate participation was "not at all important" to their vocational discernment.

## College Service Programs

Six in ten respondents participated in college service program. This was more common among those attending Catholic colleges and universities (76 percent compared to 51 percent attending other campuses).

**College Service Programs**

| | | Type of College | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Catholic** | **Non-Catholic** |
| Participated in service program(s) during college | 60% | 76% | 51% |
| If R participated in service program(s): | | | |
| Participated in "Alternative Spring Break" | 40% | 44% | 36% |
| Location of program… | | | |
| Local/In own community | 12% | 8% | 16% |
| Outside of own community but in the U.S. | 61 | 58 | 63 |
| Outside of the U.S. | 28 | 34 | 21 |
| Participated in a summer service program | 30% | 31% | 29% |
| Location of program… | | | |
| Local or in own community | 31% | 29% | 32% |
| Outside of own community but in the U.S. | 43 | 44 | 42 |
| Outside of the U.S. | 27 | 27 | 26 |
| Program was sponsored by a religious order | 26% | 38% | 15% |
| Organized reflection or prayer was an element | 71% | 79% | 64% |
| Type… | | | |
| Communal or group | 92% | 93% | 91% |
| Individual | 8 | 7 | 9 |

Among those participating in service programs, 40 percent took part in "Alternative Spring Break" service trips and 30 percent took part in a summer service program.

Among those participating in "Alternative Spring Break" service trips, 61 percent did so outside of their own community but in the United States. Twenty-eight percent did so outside of the United States and 12 percent participated within their own community. Those attending a Catholic college were slightly more likely than others to go outside of the United States (34 percent compared to 21 percent).

Six in ten respondents participated in social activities sponsored by campus ministry. About three in four of those attending Catholic colleges and universities reported this compared to fewer than half attending non-Catholic campuses (76 percent compared to 49 percent).

Among those who said they participated in social activities there are not substantial differences between those attending Catholic and non-Catholic campuses. Overall, 68 percent of respondents participated in these regularly, 22 percent periodically, and 10 percent seldom.

Among those who participated in campus ministry programs, students who attended a Catholic college or university were more likely than those attending non-Catholic campuses to say these were at least "somewhat" important to their vocational discernment (51 percent compared to 36 percent).

Students who were active in campus ministry were asked about the availability of Mass for students on their campus during college. Their responses likely reflect the general availability of Mass for all students. However, some of those not involved in campus ministry may have been unaware of these opportunities for worship. Among those attending a Catholic college or university 93 percent said daily Masses were available, 4 percent said Mass was less than weekly, and 3 percent said this was less than weekly or not at all. By comparison 42 percent of those attending non-Catholic colleges or universities reported the availability of daily Mass and 24 percent indicated this was available at least weekly. Five percent said this was available less than weekly and 29 percent indicated Mass was not available at all.

## Social Activities

A majority of respondents attending a Catholic college or university reported participation in the following activities at least "occasionally" during college: clubs or student organizations (86 percent), campus ministry (77 percent), Pro-Life or March for Life group (67 percent), and athletics or intramural sports (58 percent). Among respondents attending non-Catholic colleges and universities only two activities attracted majority participation: clubs or student organizations (68 percent) and campus ministry (51 percent).

***How frequently, if at all, did you participate in any of the following activities during college?***

Percentage indicating activity ("seldom"/"occasionally" to "frequently"/"always")

| | | Type of College | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Catholic** | **Non-Catholic** |
| Clubs/Student Organizations | 74% | 86% | 68% |
| Campus Ministry | 61 | 77 | 51 |
| Athletics or intramural sports | 52 | 58 | 49 |
| Pro-Life/March for Life Group | 47 | 67 | 36 |
| Drama/Music | 42 | 49 | 37 |
| Parish Young Adult Group | 27 | 18 | 32 |
| Student Government | 18 | 21 | 16 |
| Residential Life (resident assistant, residential minister) | 17 | 26 | 12 |
| Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) | 11 | 13 | 10 |
| Greek Sorority | 6 | 2 | 8 |

Few respondents report membership in a sorority (6 percent) or student government (18 percent). More than a quarter were involved in a parish young adult group (27 percent) and this was more common among those attending non-Catholic campuses (32 percent).

## Discussion of Faith, Religion, and Prayer

Six in ten respondents indicated that they discussed faith, religion, or prayer "periodically" or more often with other students outside of class (60 percent). Less commonly they indicated discussing this with the same frequency in class (35 percent) or with professors outside of class (24 percent).

**During your time in college how often did you discuss faith, religion, prayer…**
Percentage responding "periodically" or more (e.g., "regularly," "frequently," "always")

| | | Type of College | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Catholic** | **Non-Catholic** |
| …in class | 35% | 76% | 12% |
| …with professors outside of class | 24 | 48 | 10 |
| …with other students outside of class | 60 | 83 | 47 |

Respondents who attended Catholic colleges and universities were significantly more likely than those attending other campuses to report at least periodic discussion about faith, religion, or prayer in class (76 percent compared to 12 percent), with students outside of class (83 percent compared to 47 percent), and with professors outside of class (48 percent compared to 10 percent).

## Encouragement

Respondents were asked about those who may have encouraged them to consider a vocation to religious life during college. The most common type of person to offer encouragement was a friend (56 percent) followed by a religious sister (55 percent), a parish priest (40 percent), or campus minister (34 percent).

**During college, did any of the following encourage you to consider a vocation to religious life?**
Percentage of those attending college responding "Yes"

| | | Type of College | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Catholic** | **Non-Catholic** |
| Friends | 56% | 73% | 46% |
| Religious sister | 55 | 72 | 45 |
| Parish priest | 40 | 42 | 39 |
| Campus ministers | 34 | 45 | 28 |
| Other | 25 | 40 | 20 |
| Parents | 22 | 29 | 18 |
| Professors | 21 | 46 | 7 |
| Religious brother | 21 | 35 | 14 |
| Siblings | 17 | 24 | 13 |
| College staff | 12 | 29 | 3 |

Those who attended Catholic colleges are more likely than those attending other campuses to have been encouraged by friends (73 percent compared to 46 percent), religious sisters (72 percent compared to 45 percent), campus ministers (45 percent compared to 28 percent), parents (29 percent compared to 18 percent), professors (46 percent compared to 7 percent), religious brothers (35 percent compared to 14 percent), siblings (24 percent compared to 13 percent), and college staff (29 percent compared to 3 percent).

The survey also asked respondents who did not enroll in college before entering their institute about vocational encouragement. In general, these respondents report more encouragement from others, compared to those who attended college prior to entering their institute. Encouragement most often came from: religious sisters (76 percent), parish priests (68 percent), friends (59 percent), parents 954 percent), teachers (39 percent), and siblings (31 percent).

**During college, did any of the following encourage you to consider a vocation to religious life?**
Percentage of those not attending college prior to entering institute responding "Yes"

| | |
|---|---|
| Religious sister | 76% |
| Parish priest | 68 |
| Friends | 59 |
| Parents | 54 |
| Other | 42 |
| Teachers | 39 |
| Siblings | 31 |
| Religious brother | 18 |
| Campus ministers | 17 |
| School staff | 16 |

## Discouragement

While many received encouragement to pursue a vocation, others received discouragement from people in their lives. The most common discouragers for those attending college were parents (25 percent) followed by friend (22 percent). Once encouragement is taken into account, parents are actually net discouragers (25 percent discouraging and 22 percent encouraging). Friends on the other hand are net encouragers (22 percent discouraging and 56 percent encouraging).

**During college, did any of the following discourage you to consider a vocation to religious life?**
Percentage of those attending college responding "Yes"

| | | Type of College | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Catholic** | **Non-Catholic** |
| Parents | 25% | 33% | 21% |
| Friends | 22 | 26 | 20 |
| Siblings | 18 | 22 | 17 |
| Other | 13 | 21 | 11 |
| Professors | 11 | 11 | 12 |
| College staff | 5 | 6 | 5 |
| Religious sister | 5 | 9 | 2 |
| Parish priest | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| Campus ministers | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| Religious brother | <1 | <1 | <1 |

Generally, those attending Catholic colleges are slightly more likely than those attending other campuses to report discouragement from many sources. Outside of friends and parents, siblings (18 percent) and professors (11 percent) are noted as discouraging by more than one in ten respondents.

The survey also asked respondents who had not attended college before entering their institute about people that may have discouraged them from pursuing a vocation. As shown in the table below, those most commonly reported as discouraging were: friends (36 percent), parents (24 parents), siblings (24 percent), teachers (15 percent), and school staffers (11 percent).

**During college, did any of the following discourage you to consider a vocation to religious life?**
Percentage of those not attending college prior to entering institute responding "Yes"

| | |
|---|---|
| Friends | 36% |
| Parents | 24 |
| Siblings | 24 |
| Other | 18 |
| Teachers | 15 |
| School staff | 11 |
| Religious sister | 6 |
| Parish priest | 4 |
| Campus ministers | 1 |
| Religious brother | 1 |

## Analysis of Open-ended Questions

The survey included four open-ended questions. Each of these is shown in this section according to the most common types of responses to these questions. Representative examples of these responses are shown for each type.

### *1) How did you meet your religious congregation?*

Almost a quarter of the respondents said that they encountered their congregation through their ministry. They were taught by them in grade school or high school or they were present on their college campus, parish or community. Among some of the responses were:

- They do ministry on the campus I attended.
- I am from the city in which the motherhouse is located, so I knew of our presence. However, I didn't begin to seriously discern with this community until several sisters came to visit and give talks at some of the campus ministry groups at my university.
- I knew the families of two women from my parish who were in my community, but I had also seen my community at high school retreats, young adult conferences and eating in the dining hall of my college.
- The sister taught catechism at my parish, and it was the only religious community that I knew of at that time.
- They made a brief visit (one hour) to my university when I was a junior. They were helping with a local young adult event, so I attended the event to talk to them more.
- While teaching at a Catholic high school and then again while at graduate school at University of Notre Dame.
- One of the sisters was the Director of Religious Education at the local parish where I was active.
- I met my religious congregation at my college, Franciscan University of Steubenville.
- I was a student at Franciscan University, and sisters from my community had a house on campus and did ministry with students. I first spoke to one of my sisters after attending a talk she gave open to all women students.
- One of my friends in college entered my community. In addition, my community has a mission in my diocese and I would see those sisters when I was in high school and college at youth events

Another quarter of the respondents found their congregation by visiting the motherhouse, or attending an open house, and/or going on a retreat with their congregation. Some of the many responses were:

- A sister from our community is from my home parish. I met her on home visit. I also ran into the Sisters at the National Shrine in Washington, D.C., and met them on retreats. I had significant conversations with the sisters in all of these circumstances.

- On a vocation discernment retreat, about four years before entering. Through a friend, I heard about the upcoming retreat and just needed some time away. So, I visited them and after that, knew that I needed to consider religious life.

- I was first introduced to my community at a one-day women's retreat on St. John Paull II's Letter to Women for high-school and college aged women hosted by Belmont Abbey College. The vocation director for my community was the one leading the retreat, though I didn't know that prior to my signing-up for the retreat.

- When I was 16 years old I met my congregation when two of the sisters came to the service retreat weekend I was attending.

- While I was in graduate school I visited the motherhouse.

- Two sisters were traveling to a vocation weekend at a college and stopped at my college to have dinner with one of their brothers. They invited young women of the campus to have pizza with them. I had attended Mass regularly and was invited to go to dinner.

- Through the CMSWR and on a Diocesan Vocation Retreat.

- My sister invited me to go on a weekend discernment retreat with her.

- Three people I met encouraged me to look into this community. I called on the phone, liked what I heard, and was directed to sign up for a weekend retreat, which I attended.

- I met a group of the sisters that were at the mission house in Phoenix. They came to a Life Teen retreat for my diocese and I talked to them.

One in six respondents found their congregation by using the Internet, searching religious communities, using an internet match site, receiving direct mail or marketing material, and/or by watching television. Following are a few of the responses:

- EWTN, Life on the Rock

- Found ad in Visions Magazine

- I e-mailed them a prayer request, and they were so nice in their response.

- I found them on the CMSWR website.
- I saw a flyer for a retreat on Facebook and emailed the vocations director about it.
- I was discerning with a friend and we found their website and also saw them on Oprah.
- Through Vision Vocation Match
- A friend shared with me a brochure she had received in the mail.

A national or local event or conference led one in ten of the respondents to their current congregation. Following are some of those responses:

- I heard about them (because they teach at a local school) but I never had the courage to talk to them. I introduced myself at a FOCUS conference, but at that point I had not "allowed myself to begin discerning. When I did about a year later, I truly got in contact/met the community by calling/meeting the vocation director
- I first met the sisters on a nun run when I was a freshman in college.
- I was working at a Youth 2000 retreat in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis called "CONSUMED" when I met the Sisters.
- World Youth Day Sydney, 2008.
- At a FOCUS conference in Florida.
- Archdiocese of Detroit—vocations picnic.
- World youth day in Madrid, Spain in 2011! A friend recommended that I meet them, after she met them at WYD in Australia in 2008.
- At a booth at the National Catholic Youth Conference.

One is ten also learned from a friend or family member about their chosen congregation. Among the responses were:

- Through a friend who worked with some of the sisters in diocesan office.
- I first met them at a vocations day at my school in second grade, but I didn't really remember them. When I was in high school my friend asked me to go on the discernment with them and that is when I really got to know and fall in love with them.
- My older sister entered the religious congregation I entered four years ahead of me. I met them when I went to visit her.

- I heard about them from a friend, found out about a discernment retreat they had from the CMSWR website, which I then attended.

- My aunt was in the congregation and I was taught by these sisters.

- My parents interviewed two of the members for a diocesan religious convocation.

About one in ten learned about their congregation from a priest or brother and was encouraged to visit or contact their motherhouse.

- College chaplain suggested that I visit the Hawthorne Dominicans so I set up a weekend visit during winter break.

- A priest on campus at the university knew of my congregation and suggested I visit. I did and felt called by God to apply and enter this community.

- A trip was organized through the zeal of a seminarian from our diocese and the graciousness of benefactors. I was open to religious life in theory, but I had never seriously discerned a religious vocation.

- I have been always very close with the Franciscan Conventual Friars. I studied in their school and then I also started working with them. Sometimes their province sends Friars from United States to Costa Rica to study Spanish; so I became close with one of them. One of them helped me to meet this community.

- Was introduced by my pastor to the diocesan Delegate for the Religious who then introduced me to the congregation.

One in 20 said they learned about their congregation by working with them during volunteer service. Some of the responses follow:

- On a volunteer trip to a work of mercy run by our sisters.

- Through my volunteer year with the Colorado Vincentian Volunteers, at my ministry sight, mount Saint Vincent home

- My mother knew of the community from a priest, and I knew of it through her. I volunteered for 2 years with the community before entering formation.

- I did a lay volunteer program our sisters run—VIDES. I found out about it through the Catholic Network of Volunteer Services website.

- I did Mercy Volunteer Corps. I learned about year-long volunteer programs from my campus minister and from a panel I heard about volunteering while on retreat in college.

- When I was in 8th grade. I had to do service hours for school so I began to volunteer for the Little sisters of the Poor.

- I was on the lookout for Carmelites because of my baptismal patroness, and so, when I found out a convent was nearby, and accepting girls' applications to volunteer there, I immediately signed up.

One in 20 were led to their congregation by the support and guidance of a religious Sister(s). Some of their responses include:

- Sister at the parish I attended

- Through a sister who is a good friend of my family

- I met a Sister who studied at my university at a Discernment Group Meeting.

- I met Mother superior in high school, before she founded our community. I met more of the sisters after college, when I served as a campus missionary for Saint Paul's outreach. They were an established community by then.

- I met a sister who told me that the congregation was about to begin an associate's program. Then I worked with a number of sisters to begin the program.

A spiritual advisor or director assisted just under one in 20 of the respondents in choosing their congregation. Some of the responses were:

- House of studies at the college I attended; member of congregation was my spiritual director.

- I met the CFR Friars at one of their apostolates near my college and felt attracted to the order, but couldn't find the sisters when I looked for them online. Then, a couple years later, my spiritual director told me there were CFR sisters and suggested I visit, so I went to volunteer and then on a Come and See

- One of the sisters was my classmate in nursing school all 4 years and her superior was my spiritual director

- I went through RCIA to become Catholic in 1994. The staff person who was the Pastoral Associate was a former member of my congregation. When I was experiencing a spiritual awakening about 3 years later she put me in touch with a Sister in my now current community who was then a Spiritual Director.

- I attended a retreat at the suggestion of my then spiritual director, a diocesan priest.

***2) What was most influential in your vocational discernment?***

Half of the respondents wrote about their prayer life and the sacraments. Many referenced Eucharistic Adoration and daily Mass although many forms of private and public prayer were also mentioned. Some of the responses were:

- Prayer (Sacraments, Adoration, and Lectio Divina)
- Personal prayer, especially in Eucharistic adoration and the Rosary
- Personal prayer
- Prayer with Scripture, Mass, Eucharistic Adoration.
- Eucharistic Adoration daily
- Eucharistic Adoration and the Rosary
- Daily Eucharistic adoration on campus
- Adoration—I started stopping by the Church for a few minutes on my way home from school. It was in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament that I heard the call, and received the courage to respond.

A third of the respondents cited some experience they had with the religious of a community. These answers varied from experiences on retreats to encountering them in daily life. Examples of these responses are:

- The joyful witness of men and women religious, their availability to the people they served, and their deep love of God that was evident.
- A sister who taught Catechism classes
- Visiting different congregations/seeing them live their life was most influential.
- Visiting each community and meeting the sisters.
- The work that the Congregation (Sisters of St Joseph) do for their communities
- The witness of religious I grew up around. The desire to be a nun.
- The joy the Institute shows in the service of others just for love of God and for any other reason. A true devotion to Our Lord and Lady and recollection with no modern theology or philosophy but only the true Teaching of the Church and the fidelity to the evangelical council.

One in seven mentioned their spiritual director as someone who was very influential in directing them to their religious vocation. Most of the spiritual directors mentioned were priests, although some were women or lay people. Some of the responses were:

- Acknowledging my Call from my spiritual director.
- My spiritual director
- Spiritual direction from a priest
- A spiritual director I met with as an adult in my 40s-50s. After she asked the question, God kept reminding me of the question. It wouldn't go away.
- My spiritual direction, a very holy priest, was most influential in my vocational discernment.
- Spiritual direction, being taught how to pray.
- My spiritual director and my confessor, both of whom encouraged me.

One in eight mentioned friends that helped them to discern their vocation, both in college and outside college. Examples of these responses are:

- The encouragement from my "spiritual family" at college (which was composed friends, professors, priests, brothers, and sisters) not only did they introduce me to the Lord and help with my re-version back to the faith (because I had become pretty lukewarm) but they taught me how to pray, taught me about the faith, loved me, and encouraged my discernment process. They were wonderful and gave me courage to discern.
- Supportive and encouraging friends, private prayer.
- Having an authentic, loving, Catholic group of friends in college who wanted me to get to heaven; also, support and encouragement to actually start discerning and continuing to discern; Friends in college gave me courage to visit convents.
- Seeing other young people radically live their faith; living witnesses.
- My own personal desire to be what God called me to be. Also the encouragement and guidance of a friend/mentor.
- The most influential thing was probably seeing other young people around me considering God's will for their life and actively engaged in their faith. It was so wonderful to have people that I looked up to discerning religious life and to know friends who entered the seminary.
- Different people that I met throughout my life.

One in ten wrote something about a priest that encouraged them to consider religious life. Most of the time they were their local or parish priest, although some mentioned a priest on a mission trip or conference. Some of the responses are:

- A priest in my religious community took me under his wing. He taught me about God's love and how He has a plan for my life. He taught me the rules for discernment and how the response to my vocation is a way of living out discipleship. He taught me how to pray and to grow in my relationship with God. He taught me so much and encouraged me. I first met him in high school and it was talking to him that I first considered a religious vocation.

- Faithful, loving, authentic diocesan priest

- My parish priest's encouragement and perseverance.

- The support of my local priests.

- At the most crucial point in my discernment, God blessed me with wise priests who gave me encouragement and pointed me in the right direction by their good counsel.

- My parish priest—his guidance, spiritual direction, and counsel.

- Realizing that parish ministry was more life giving than my career. My parish priest had a conversation with me about this that started the ball rolling.

One in ten respondents mentioned a Catholic retreat they went on and were able to discern God's will. These varied from retreats to discern their vocation to college retreats. Examples of their responses are:

- A "come and see" visit

- Getting to know the sisters in my congregation from their discernment and come and see retreats helped me discern that this was the order God was calling me to join.

- Attending retreats hosted by my community and held at the Motherhouse was probably the most influential thing in my discernment because it allowed me to see the sisters' way of life and to experience how much I felt at home here.

- My faith in Jesus and Mother Mary through a pilgrimage to Fatima, Rome, Poland. John Paul II, Our Lady of Fatima, my beloved brothers and graces received from God. My life is a pure gift from God.

- Attending "Eagle Eye" retreat with the Brothers of St. John in high school

- The vocation retreat at the motherhouse

One in ten mentioned God's calling for their life in some way different than the other categories listed. Examples include:

- God's calling me to serve others and to dedicate my life to Him.
- Experiencing God's love for me and all mankind. I wanted to love him more in gratitude for this great love.
- Being open to the movements and inspirations of the Holy Spirit.
- I felt that God was calling me and I wanted to know and do His will.
- Knowing God's plan for me and opening my heart for his plan.
- Knowing strongly that god called me.
- Actively asking God to guide me according to His will, being aware of His finger pointing me along my path and following.

One in ten mentioned something about their family. Mostly this included their immediate family, although some mention children or distant relatives. Some of their responses include:

- My family especially my parents' love of the church and faithful prayers influenced me to love more of God led me t discern my vocation of religious life.
- The strong spiritual background that my parents set for me and my family really influenced my discernments. They set the foundation, then just relied on God to lead me
- My mother and her deep Carmelite faith.
- The family upbringing
- My twin sister's discernment and entrance into religious life.
- My aunt
- My dad. I lost my dad when I was 13 years old. He always wanted me to receive the sacraments from childhood... which was not possible ... After his death I could not stop thinking about his words, "go to church and ask for catechism classes." I finished receiving the sacraments at 20 years old.

Less than one in ten respondents mentioned their experiences in college. Some mentioned a Newman Center or Catholic club specifically. Some examples are:

- The sister who was my classmate became my study partner so we would study for almost all of our tests together. We would go over to the convents to study as it was quieter than

my apartment. And although we were studying we would stop for prayer, she stilled maintained her horarium as a religious sister and I followed the schedule. So it was a very consistent but unstructured exposure to their way of life was most influential

- It was while in college I first heard Jesus inviting me into Religious Life. And it was through many religious experiences in college and after that helped foster my openness to discerning religious life.

- The support of a prayer life that I received in college was important but more important was the availability of Eucharistic Adoration (permanently on campus) and the Mass (home parish was within walking distance during high school I attended daily, this habit I continued in college as was possible).

- Having an authentic, loving, Catholic group of friends in college who wanted me to get to heaven; Also, support and encouragement to actually start discerning and continuing to discern; Friends in college gave me courage to visit convents.

- Mentors and campus ministers

- Praying the Divine Office with the monks at my college and the study of philosophy

- The Brotherhood of Hope, my campus ministers at FSU.

Less than one in ten wrote about the service they had done with and for other people. Usually the service was done with religious, but not always. Some of the responses are:

- The most influential part of my vocational discernment was working with the people on the mission trips.

- Volunteering and living in community though this experience was not Catholic.

- Being a Salesian Lay Missionary

- Social work with women and youth

- A couple of mission trips to Mexico with a group of peer and lay missionaries (Family Missions Company in Louisiana). The retreats I attended at the Motherhouse as well as the email contact I had with the vocation Director.

- Ministry as a chaplain made me closer to God and to God's people. I felt the greatest poverty was feeling of loneliness. I felt a call to journey with the sick, dying and those who are alone. As a Religion teacher I also felt there was deep longing in the students to get to know God and experience God's love. This call led me to get closer to the person of Christ, which was an inspiration and the courage for me to leave the order and the country to join a religious order here in USA.

- Teaching in Belize after graduating, a year of service outside the country.

Less than one in ten respondents wrote something else about the Bible or other holy books, Discernment groups, Mary/Marian devotions, and Catholic Schools. Examples of the responses are:

- The most influential thing was my prayer and reflection, the influence of spiritual writers and the monastic tradition, and my desire to give myself in service to God and all of creation.

- I read the life of our foundress, Mother Clelia Merloni. I wanted to be one of her daughters.

- The discernment group led by the sisters—the Apostles of the Interior Life. They were very open about presenting all the vocations as options and the joys and challenges of each.

- My youth group.

- Marian Conservation - Our Lady absolutely led and helped me choose her Son's will. This is primary and will continue to be.

- Consecrating myself to the Blessed Mother. She helped me to know and love her Son.

- Going on a vocation talk in eighth grade with my class. The talks were given by religious, single and married people. Marriage was beautiful and very much desired but I felt very called to religious life and in particularly to the community I am in.

***3) If you answered Yes to question one, (Did you attend college or university prior to entering your religious institute?) during college, what kept you motivated in pursuing a vocation to religious life?***

One-third of all respondents said that a calling from God or a strong drive or yearning motivated them to pursue religious life. In some cases many women felt a void that was fulfilled when they accepted their deep love of God. Among the many responses were:

- I grew up always knowing that God had a specific, beautiful plan for my life, and I wanted to find out what the plan was and do it. Also, I frequently experienced a tension between desires for marriage and the idea that religious life was my vocation. This tension played out in that I never felt free to pursue a dating relationship because I had a persistent sense that I was already reserved for someone else.

- A deep desire in me that kept coming up because I didn't feel fulfilled.

- A deep desire to give myself and to find a place that would receive that gift. There was an intense amount of frustration in not finding where I was called to give.

- A restless heart combined with disillusionment on seeing the career/money driven atmosphere of my college program. God truly spoke to me through Scripture (especially Psalms and gospels) and prayer.

- Discovering the depth of God's love kept me pursuing his mystery. My vocation grew naturally from developing that relationship.

- Grace. I was wholeheartedly convinced I had a vocation, convinced of Christ's love for us on the Cross and convinced I had to respond to that love with the gift of my whole life. A regular prayer life was also a key component.

- I converted to Catholicism as a sophomore in college, and my newfound love for Christ in the sacraments drew me to do whatever he wanted - including religious life!

- We were living the Catholic culture at my school. To be honest, I was looking to pursue marriage, but I experienced a lot of restlessness, and realized the Lord was calling me to be his alone.

- The sense of God calling me just would not go away, no matter how much I tried to run and cover it up.

- My encounters with Jesus during adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. He's the fountain of love and grace. I couldn't get enough time with the Lord, so to speak. I could see during times of adoration that the Lord related to me as a husband does to a wife and it was then that I realized that Jesus was calling me to be his bride.

Close to a quarter of respondents said they did not know that they were going to pursue a religious vocation in college, their decision came after they graduated. Among the many responses were:

- Did not begin discerning a call to religious life until many years after college.

- During college I had absolutely no interest in pursuing a vocation to religious life.

- I am a late vocation, my discernment started when I was 30 years old.

- I didn't begin discerning my vocation until after college. I attended a focus conference and was introduced to adoration. In this experience I felt the Lord inviting me to learn about religious life. I then began taking my prayer and sacramental life more seriously and getting involved in my parish/ young adult activities.

- I had no inclination towards religious life while in college. I didn't even know it existed.

- I only said “I’m open” in college but I actually ran away from it for those years but I'd say I could express I was open because my college had an atmosphere that promoted and cared for religious vocations.

- I wasn't—I ran from it! I basically left the faith—only went to church when I was home with my parents. It wasn't until later, 5 years after college, I returned to the faith and responded to the call God still placed before me.

- Nothing during college inspired me or motivated me toward a vocation to religious life.

One in five respondents said prayer, Mass, and Eucharistic adoration were important factors which kept them motivated during college to pursue a religious life. Some of the responses include:

- Attending Mass, receiving communion, studying theology.

- Daily prayer life.

- Frequent personal prayer, especially at Eucharistic Exposition, a very strong Catholic family life, and the kind, encouraging letters I received from the Vocations Directress, all greatly helped me to pursue my vocation.

- I wanted more than a boring, mediocre life. I wanted to give all and live a life on fire. I also was going to weekly Adoration and more-than-once weekly Mass with friends, keeping me in close contact with Christ and keeping me thinking and talking about the faith and vocations.

- My personal devotions.

- Regular prayer - recognizing my satisfaction/happiness/strength in that in the midst of regular, sometimes stressful college living.

- The Holy Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, and the influence of holy friends.

- Daily prayer, silence and Mass.

- I had an incredible scholarship and I loved college, but there was always a nagging question in my mind: "why wait?" For me, it was not a question of if but when. My daily attendance at Mass definitely helped keep me motivated.

- I was not pursuing a vocation to the religious life during college, it was not until shortly after that I began to pursue my vocation. Adoration and prayer were my two main motivators once I began discerning.

One in seven respondents wrote that they were motivated to pursue a vocation because they had the positive encouragement from family, friends or a religious. Many women found that friends discerning prompted them to pursue religious life while in college. Some of their responses were:

- A supportive family, and my brother, who though he never explicitly encouraged my vocation, "dragged" me to daily Mass.

- Encouragement of priests and friends, a tug in my heart

- I had a very strong group of Catholic friends to push and support me in all areas of my faith. This was also when I began to actually spend time just getting to know some religious sisters and seeing how real they are was helpful.

- I don't know that I would say anything specific kept me motivated. Everything began very suddenly at the beginning of my second year. At that point I knew this was what I was being called to and that I simply needed to find where God was calling me. I suppose I could say the same things kept me going - Mass, adoration and personal prayer, as well as the support of my friends (two of whom were discerning at the same time as I) and the Newman House chaplain.

- I had very supportive friends as well as many friends who were also discerning their vocation. It was completely normal in my group of friends and at the Newman Center to discern your vocation.

- I was richly nourished by friends who desired holiness and virtue. Their continued friendship and my own personal prayers were great motivations for me.

- The support of my friends, professors, and friends who were in religious life, especially young Jesuits who were friends of mine.

- I discussed it with my roommate and friends in the dorm. I wrote my senior thesis on happiness, so I was really seeking for happiness in my life, and I knew it had to be somehow connected to God.

One in ten respondents said that it was their community in college, the surrounding culture, people and events that kept them inspired to seek a religious life. Among the responses were:

- The "still small voice," of course, and regularly seeing seminarians and priests happily living their vocations were both of help in pursuing my vocation. While there were women religious around CUA at that time, their visibility was not as high... when I did see them, it was an incredible boost. Seeing consecrated men and women gave me a desire for the joy they so clearly had, and seeing them in class and around campus motivated me to seek the Lord even when the options and obstacles seemed more than abundant.

- An atmosphere of openness to God's will promoted by the spirit of the University of Dallas.

- During college life, I was not really thinking or discerning on religious life yet. What motivated or at least have some influence on my vocation decision is the environment and people that I am surrounded by (I have always been intact in a Christian setting, such as school, home and community, etc.)

- During college, I tried (at first) in vain to "experience" the world without Catholicism. I tried to snuff out my vocation. The presence of the Newman Center eventually opened up a whole new life for me. Suddenly, I saw that there were other young people who were deeply involved in the faith, so that motivated me to clean up my act and become who God created me to be. I see that college can take people away from faith, but student ministries can draw them back to the Truth! God bless you all!

- Inspired by some Religious Sisters on Campus.

- The call to religious life was "off and on" - it helped in college to take several "Religious Studies" classes which were insightful and spiritually moving.

- The community spirit in the Newman Center and sense of belonging to the Parish and the universal Church at large.

- My university is filled with students who are excited about serving God and this church so I was constantly surrounded by very supportive friends and stranger.

- Staying connected with Campus Ministry, Catholic friends and my Religious community.

- The constant array of spiritual activities made available by our campus ministry, from excellent retreats, to activities of all kinds being offered every day ("Supper Seminars," Adoration, Mass, the Rosary, Bible Studies, Prayer & Praise, etc.) all helped me to pray more openly to the Lord every day and listen for what He had in mind.

- The very positive example of the religious who surrounded me, daily reception and adoration of the Eucharist on campus, support from family and close friends, missionary work.

***4) If you answered yes to question one, during college, what discouraged you in pursuing a vocation to religious life?***

About one in four respondents said that a family member or friend had discouraged them in their consideration of a vocation to religious life. This included parents, siblings, other relatives, friends, and classmates. This is the largest identifiable source of discouragement experienced by the respondents. Among the many responses were:

- What discouraged me the most were the people closest to me who kept discouraging me and telling me that I was too pretty to be a nun or that I would make a much better wife and mother than a Religious Sister. They put a lot of doubt into my heart.

- I was discouraged by my parents, by guys my age, and by feelings of aversion towards religious life.

- My parents and friends (from outside the Newman Center) didn't really understand it, and focused heavily on the trials, the deprivations, etc.

- Some of my professors tried to persuade me to get a graduate degree before entering - which tempted my ambition - and I was also afraid that I might be making the wrong life choice in entering religious life. My parents were extremely angry that I was entering and tried desperately to keep me out of the convent.

- Above all, the emotional anguish and constant tears of my mother coupled with the mean and angry phone calls from my father.

- Probably my family. My mother's relationship with the church was not a favorable one. It was only when I learned to speak with my own voice that I felt free to listen to God's voice.

- Boyfriend, employers, some siblings, friends, etc...

- I had a few friends that thought it would be a waste of my life. I wouldn't consider that active discouragement, just that they didn't see the appeal.

The desire for marriage and a family were cited by about one in ten respondents as discouragement to pursuing a vocation to religious life. A current boyfriend or romantic interest during their college years was often a challenge. Some of the responses were:

- I found the idea of being a wife and mother very attractive, and I enjoyed dating.

- Desire to have a family was a deterrent in pursuing a religious vocation, but discerning my vocation was important and once discerned that I should enter, I could not be discouraged from pursuing it.

- It was a pretty unknown path. I had some friendships with young men that I could have seen ripening into romance, and the idea of marriage was very attractive to me.

- The thought of leaving my family and having to end a relationship with a young man, as well as my love for the world.

- A charming man!

- Wanting to get married and have a family.

Another one in ten responded that they were discouraged from pursuing a vocation by their own active social life in college, the demands of being a student, and the focus of pursuing a career. Among the responses were:

- I enjoyed being on my own, making my own decisions, pursuing my own interests. This independence made considering a vocation to the religious life difficult.

- Desire to keep having "the good life."

- Everything--the work I wanted to do, I had a serious boyfriend, I loved worldly things. I tried to drown out God by replacing him with all sorts of beautiful things of His making.

- The social life! Most of my friends were dating. None of the girls I knew were considering a vocation.

- A desire to try to achieve all my more worldly dreams.

- I was pursuing a career foremost via graduate studies, and potentially a significant relationship leading to marriage.

The impact of the broader society and culture as a discourager was noted by about one-tenth of the respondents. They often found that pursuing a vocation to religious life was counter-cultural, few if any cultural supports for their choice. A few of the responses are:

- Worldliness and materialism

- Wanting to have fun, wanting to be part of the world, wanting to have "normal" life, not desiring God's will.

- There are a lot of pressures in the world today. Also many choices for women. I think of my own experience and our culture in the U.S. is one of which we say we must be independent on our own, we can do this without anyone's help. Our world is not only so independent of one another and self-centered but also about getting a degree to get a job to make money, to buy a house, a car, to wanting, wanting, so that this cycle of over usage and unhappiness continues. So in all, I grew up with the faith, volunteering/helping those in need but with the contradictions, of really I don't need

community I don' need church to get a job, be successful, to help others. Also the negativity towards the church at the time, with the sex abuse charges being just brought about, it made me question the Hierarchical church and whether those in clerical power/positions really have a relationship with God or whether they are just putting on a front

- A vocation to religious life was probably the last thing on my mind during college. Familial and social influences measured success by the starting salary following graduation.

- The world and all its attractions. It was hard not to become so attracted by the world and its offer of success, money and pleasure.

The lack of familiarity with religious life or the exposure to women religious was cited by less than one in ten as being a discouragement to them. A few of the responses were:

- There were not many religious sisters to observe and talk to (only brothers)

- I did not think that religious life was something that anyone normal ever approached anymore, as religious were not a real part of my life at that point. A couple of friends joked with me during college that I would become a nun, and we all laughed.

- I thought that only odd people enter religious communities.

- I did not know what religious life really was nor had I met any sisters who I looked up to.

- I didn't know anyone else even considering this. I was afraid to tell my friends and family.

Less than one in ten respondents mentioned that they were discouraged by their own fears. Fear of what their family and friends would think, fear of being unhappy or lonely in religious life. Some of the responses were:

- My own fears were the biggest discouragement. There was a lot I was unsure about within myself - my own abilities, my relationship with the Lord, my relationships with others. I didn't know if I could give myself completely to God in religious life and still be happy.

- Fear of being unhappy.

- The discouragement mostly came from my own false idea of religious life and my own fears of what others would think of me and whether or not I'd still be accepted.

- The fear that I would be lonely if I didn't get married.

- Fear of what my parents and family would think if I said I wanted to enter religious life. Also, a desire to continue pursuing my dream of becoming a journalist, the fear of giving up on something I had worked since high school to achieve. And a fear that religious life would be too confining for me, that I wouldn't be able to use my talents. All of those things discouraged me from actively pursuing a vocation.

- Fear of being ridiculed by my family, friends, and peers.

A small number of respondents said that they were discouraged by their own self-doubts or poor self-image. They had a difficult time accepting the idea that they might be called to religious life. Among the responses were:

- My own lack of self-worth. I honestly believed I wasn't good enough or holy enough to be a sister. I had this notion that sisters were/are ultra-holy people who never sin. It was an unrealistic view of both sisters and myself.

- My own doubts

- My own stubbornness... what I thought would bring me joy, but once I let myself be free to receive what God desired, I realized that my happiness was full rather than fleeting.

- My self-absorbed intellectualism, and my poor judgment of parish priests and nuns.

- Feeling unworthy of a vocation, that I wasn't "good enough."

A small number of respondents commented that their own negative experiences with a woman religious or priest was a discouragement to them in pursuing a vocation. They wrote:

- Poor examples of other religious, discouragements from professors and academic studies.

- I met some Sisters during my university years, but they did not impress me at all. They were not in habits, did not live in community, and were giving the Newman House chaplain a hard time. After university, I met a Sister who told me she did not recommend Daily Mass. Maybe I would have discerned sooner if I'd met more faithful Religious Sisters.

- There are some priests or religious, who are not happy or they love power or money. They do not make me like religious life.

- I met some congregations with a very rigid mindset, and that was disappointing.

A small number of respondents specifically cited educational debt as a discouragement to pursuing a vocation in religious life. A few of the comments were:

- And, it had to keep me motivated after college too because I had $58,000 worth of student loans to pay off! Student loans are so high these days that many people (especially young women) cannot enter religious life until they are paid off! I had to wait. But, praise God, He worked everything out!

- Nothing. It took me longer to enter because of my student loan debt. After I graduated, it took me five and half years to pay off my debt. From there I was free and received blessings from my family which was a great thing. It was worth to wait ten yers before I entered.

- The importance of getting a job, paying off loans

- Debt after college.

About one-fourth of the respondents noted other discouragements to their pursuing a vocation to religious life during their college years. Some examples are:

- God had other plans for me at that point in my life.

- It's often busy and hard to get away in college, and it was easy to put off discernment.

- The only thing that made me hesitate at all was giving up a full-ride scholarship without finishing my degree. I had only been to college for one year, and my family very practically (though not forcefully) reminded me that if I did not have a vocation an left the community, I would have no degree and no money to get one. However, they were very supportive when I decided to enter anyway, and God has richly rewarded this sacrifice!!

- The college that I attended had such a vibrant faith life that it made it difficult to see why I needed to "leave the world" for a deep relationship with Christ. I was already surrounded by people really seeking after Him, so I didn't know that I needed more.

- I had the experience of watching several young sisters leave the community I was being drawn towards entering. I remember thinking, "Why should I enter when everyone else is leaving?"

- The sexual scandal in the Church and the inept ways in which it was handled by the hierarchy

- I felt it was important to live a life outside of my parents' home, as an adult taking care of a home, rent, food, transportation, basic budgeting and living to gain understanding and be financially self-sufficient before entering a community.

## Part III: Important Factors for Vocational Discernment in College

This part of the report is a summary of the factors noted by respondents as being most important or influential to their vocational discernment in college.[4]

**1) Mass Attendance during College**

Eighty-six percent of respondents attending Catholic colleges and 68 percent attending other campuses noted that their participation in Mass during college had "some" or "very much" importance in their vocational discernment.

**2) Contact with Clergy and Religious on Campus**

Eighty-four percent of respondents attending Catholic colleges and 58 percent attending other campuses noted that contact with priests, sisters, and/or brothers during college had "some" or "very much" importance in their vocational discernment.

**3) College Retreats**

Participation in retreats in college was widespread among respondents regardless of the college they attended. About three in four of those who participated in these said retreats had "some" or "very much" influence on their vocational discernment (77 percent of those attending Catholic colleges and 76 percent of those on other campuses).

**4) "Come & See" or "Live-in Experience"**

Although those on Catholic campuses are more likely than those on other campuses to participate in a "Come & See" or "live-in experience" with a religious order (65 percent compared to 38 percent), among those who did, most say these had "some" or "very much" influence on their vocational discernment (81 percent, regardless of college type).

**5) Eucharistic Adoration**

Although those on Catholic campuses are more likely than those on other campuses to participate in Eucharistic Adoration weekly while in college (62 percent compared to 36 percent), this is considered by many to have had "some" or "very much" influence on their vocational discernment (86 percent of those at Catholic colleges and 69 percent on other campuses).

**6) College Service Programs**

A majority of respondents, regardless of type of college, participated in college service programs. Of those participating, majorities also indicate that these had "some" or "very much" influence on their vocational discernment (65 percent of those who attended Catholic colleges and 55 percent of those attending other campuses).

**7) Praying the Rosary**

Fifty-five percent of respondents who attended Catholic colleges prayed the rosary weekly while in college compared to 45 percent of those attending other campuses. Regardless of the frequency with which one prayed the rosary most found it to have at least "some"

[4] Note that one cannot determine causality with these factors. For example, having interest in a vocation in college may lead one to be more likely to attend Mass. There is a correlation between these factors but the direction of causality cannot be established.

influence on their vocational discernment (67 percent of those at Catholic colleges and 61 percent on other campuses).

**8) Scripture Meditation**

Sixty-nine percent of those attending Catholic colleges and 52 percent of those attending other colleges participated in Scripture meditation at least once a month in college. Majorities of respondents indicated this had at least "some" influence on their vocational discernment (72 percent at Catholic colleges and 62 percent of those attending elsewhere).

**9) Clergy and Religious Faculty and Campus Ministers at Catholic Colleges**

Respondents attending Catholic colleges were much more likely than those attending a non-Catholic college to have a priest, sister, or brother as a professor or a campus minister. Among those who did at Catholic colleges, these were individuals who were noted to have a significant and positive effect on the respondent's vocational discernment. Sixty two percent of those on Catholic campuses who had a clergy or religious professor said they had a significant positive influence and 46 percent of those who had clergy or religious as campus ministers responded as such.

**10) Campus Ministry at Catholic Colleges**

Nine in ten of those who attended a Catholic college or university participated in campus ministry programs (91 percent). Among those who did, 51 percent indicate that these were "somewhat" or "very" important to their vocational discernment.[5]

**11) Spiritual Directors**

Minorities of respondents had spiritual directors in college (44 percent at Catholic colleges and 24 percent of those on other campuses). However, among those who did, strong majorities said these had at least "some" influence on their vocational discernment (91 percent at Catholic colleges and 98 percent on other campuses).

**12) Classmates at Catholic Colleges**

Many respondents share their vocational discernment with close friends at college. This is more common on Catholic campuses (88 percent compared to 57 percent). Majorities at Catholic campuses say this had "some" or "very much" influence on their vocational discernment (66 percent). This is not the case on other campuses where only 37 percent report this to have that same level of influence on their discernment.

[5] Fewer, 69 percent, at other campuses participated in campus ministry and a minority of these respondents said these were at least "somewhat" influential in their vocational discernment.