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***Women and Men Entering Religious Life:
The Entrance Class of 2015***

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

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Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a national survey of women and men who formally entered a religious congregation, province, or monastery based in the United States during 2015. To obtain the names and contact information for these women and men (postulants and novices), the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) contacted the major superiors of all religious institutes that belong to either the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) or the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR), the two leadership conferences of apostolic women religious in the United States. CARA also contacted the major superiors of all religious institutes who belong to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM). Finally, CARA contacted the major superiors of 138 contemplative communities of women in the United States that were identified by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. Each major superior was asked to provide contact information for every person who entered the institute (for the first time, as a postulant or novice) in the United States since January 1, 2015. CARA then mailed a survey to each new entrant and asked them to return their completed survey to CARA.

After repeated follow-ups, CARA received a response from 447 of 790 major superiors, for an overall response rate of 57 percent among religious institutes. In all, 75 percent of LCWR superiors, 55 percent of CMSWR superiors, 52 percent of CMSM superiors, and 22 percent of superiors of contemplative communities provided contact information for 411 novices or postulants that entered religious life for the first time in the United States in 2015. The Entrance Class of 2015 consists of 218 men (reported by CMSM superiors), 120 women reported by CMSWR, 54 women reported by LCWR, and 19 new entrants into contemplative communities of women.

Of these 411 identified women and men, a total of 279 responded to the survey by December 31, 2015. This represents a response rate of 68 percent of the new entrants to religious life that were reported to CARA by major superiors.

Major Findings

Characteristics of Responding Institutes and Entrants

- More than two in three responding religious institutes had no one entering religious life in 2015. One in seven institutes had one entrant and about one in five reported two or more.
- The average age of respondents of the Entrance Class of 2015 is 30. Just over half are women and just under half are men. Among the men, four in five expect to become a priests and one in five plans to become a perpetually professed brother.
- Most (81 percent) were born in the United States. Of those born outside the United States, the most common countries of origin are Vietnam and Mexico. On average, the respondents who were born outside the United States were 22 years old when they first came to the United States and lived here for 12 years before entering religious life.
- Seven in ten responding entrants (71 percent) identify as white, one in eight (13 percent) identifies as Hispanic, one in ten (9 percent) identifies as Asian, and one in twenty (6 percent) identifies as black.
- Nine in ten (93 percent) respondents have been Catholic since birth. Three in four (75 percent) come from families in which both parents are Catholic. Almost all respondents (95 percent) have at least one sibling and the most common number of siblings is one or two. More than a third (36 percent) have four or more siblings. Overall, respondents are typically one of the middle children in their family.
- Half of these entrants (50 percent) attended a Catholic elementary school, which is approximately the same as that for all Catholic adults in the United States (42 percent). These entrants are more likely than other U.S. Catholics, however, to have attended a Catholic high school (39 percent of responding entrants, compared to 22 percent of U.S. adult Catholics) and much more likely to have attended a Catholic college or university before entering their institute (40 percent of entrants, compared to just 6 percent of U.S. adult Catholics). Men are more likely than women to have attended a Catholic college or university (34 percent for women compared to 46 percent for men).
- The responding entrants are highly educated. Seven in ten entered their religious institute with at least a bachelor's degree (69 percent for women and 75 percent for men).
- Many were active in various religious programs, activities or ministries before entering their religious institute. Two in three did volunteer work in a parish or other setting and three in four participated in retreats before entering. More than eight in ten (84 percent) had ministry experience before entering their religious institute, most commonly as a lector (64 percent) or in catechetical ministry (46 percent).

Vocational Discernment

- On average, responding entrants report that they were 19 years old when they first considered a vocation to religious life, the same for women as for men.
- Nearly all entrants say that they were encouraged by other members of their religious institute (97 percent), by their vocation director (96 percent) or by their spiritual director (95 percent) when they first considered entering a religious institute. Men are a little more likely than women to say they received encouragement from a campus minister or from people in their school or workplace.
- Respondents are less likely to report that they received encouragement from their family members than from other religious, friends, or a parish priest. Two in three (65 percent) report that their parents encouraged them. Fewer received encouragement from siblings (62 percent) or from other relatives (55 percent).
- Nearly all say they were “very” attracted to religious life by a sense of call and by a desire for prayer and spiritual growth. Women were more likely than men to be “very” attracted by a sense of call to religious life, while men were more likely than women to be “very” attracted by a desire to be part of a community. Seven in ten were “very” attracted to their religious institute by its spirituality and by the example of the members of the institute.
- Entrants were equally likely to report that they first became acquainted with their religious institute in an institution where its members served (34 percent) or through an internet search (33 percent). Men, however, were more likely than women to have become acquainted with their institute through one of its institutions (50 percent for men compared to 21 percent for women).
- Nine in ten report that the community life and prayer life/prayer styles of their institute were at least “somewhat” influential in their decision to enter their religious institute.

Experience of Religious Life, Attractions, and Challenges

- Daily Eucharist and private personal prayer are “very” important to nearly all entrants. Living and praying with other members are also “very” important to more than eight in ten. Eight in ten report that members of their institute wear a habit and more than six in ten say that the habit is required in all or most circumstances.
- About eight in ten or more rate their religious institute as “excellent” in its faithfulness to prayer and spiritual growth, its welcome and support of newer members, and its commitment to ministry. Nearly as many rate it that highly in its opportunities for spiritual growth and its fidelity to the Church and its teachings.
- Three in four rate their religious institute as “excellent” in its opportunities for personal growth and in their sense of identity as religious. Seven in ten rate it as highly in its sense

of identity as institute members, its focus on mission, and its response to the needs of our time. Women were more likely than men to indicate that their religious institute is “excellent” in its faithfulness to prayer and spiritual growth, in its fidelity to the Church and its teaching, and in its communal prayer experiences.

- Prayer and community life were the two aspects that entrants say attracted them to their religious institute. The founder/foundress, the spirituality, and the charism of the institute were other common factors that attracted respondents to their religious institute. Community life is also commonly mentioned by entrants as one of the things they find most challenging about religious life.

Introduction

In 2014, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University to conduct an annual survey of women and men who enter religious life each year in a religious congregation, province, or monastery based in the United States. For this project, CARA was asked to gather information about the characteristics and experiences of these women and men in a fashion similar to the survey of perpetually professed that CARA conducts each year for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, which is released each year at the time of the World Day of Consecrated Life in February. CARA designed a questionnaire based on previous CARA research on religious life and reviewed it with a representative from the Hilton Foundation. This report presents results of this survey of women and men of the Entrance Class of 2015.

To obtain the names and contact information for these women and men (postulants and novices),¹ CARA contacted the major superiors of all religious institutes that belong to either the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) or the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR), the two leadership conferences of apostolic women religious in the United States. CARA also contacted the major superiors of all religious institutes who belong to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), which includes both apostolic and contemplative institutes. Finally, CARA contacted the major superiors of 138 contemplative communities of women in the United States that were identified by the USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. Each major superior was asked to provide contact information for every person who entered the institute (for the first time, as a novice or postulant) in the United States since January 1, 2015. CARA then mailed a survey to each new entrant and asked them to return their completed survey to CARA.

After repeated follow-ups, CARA received a response from 447 of 790 major superiors, for an overall response rate of 57 percent among religious institutes. In all, 75 percent of LCWR superiors, 55 percent of CMSWR superiors, 52 percent of CMSM superiors, and 22 percent of superiors of contemplative communities provided contact information for 411 postulants or novices that entered religious life for the first time in the United States in 2015. The Entrance Class of 2015 consists of 218 men (reported by CMSM superiors), 120 women reported by CMSWR, 54 women reported by LCWR, and 19 new entrants into contemplative communities

¹ There are notable differences among religious institutes in both their terminology and their practices during the first year of initial formation, i.e., following entrance into the religious institute. In most institutes of women religious, those who enter are called "postulants" or "candidates" and the initial phase of formation typically lasts at least six months to a year, although two years of candidacy before the new entrant becomes a novice is not uncommon. Although many institutes of men religious follow similar patterns, some have a much shorter period of postulancy. Among the Dominicans and the Jesuits, for example, men enter and become novices after a postulancy of only two to three weeks. Moreover, some religious institutes, including the Jesuits, use the term "candidate" for those who are considering entering the institute. That is, some institutes call the prospective member a "candidate" before he or she enters while others use the term to describe someone who has entered. This report is about the men and women who entered a religious institute in the United States in 2015 regardless of what they are called or their stage of initial formation.

of women. Of these 411 identified women and men, a total of 279 responded to the survey by December 31, 2015. This represents a response rate of 68 percent of new entrants to religious life that were reported to CARA by major superiors.

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

This report is arranged in three parts: Part I describes characteristics of the institutes that responded to the request for names as well as characteristics of the Entrance Class of 2015. Part II describes aspects of the vocational discernment of the Entrance Class of 2015. Part III describes their experience of religious life so far and reports, in their own words, what attracts them to religious life and what they find most challenging about religious life.

Interpreting this Report

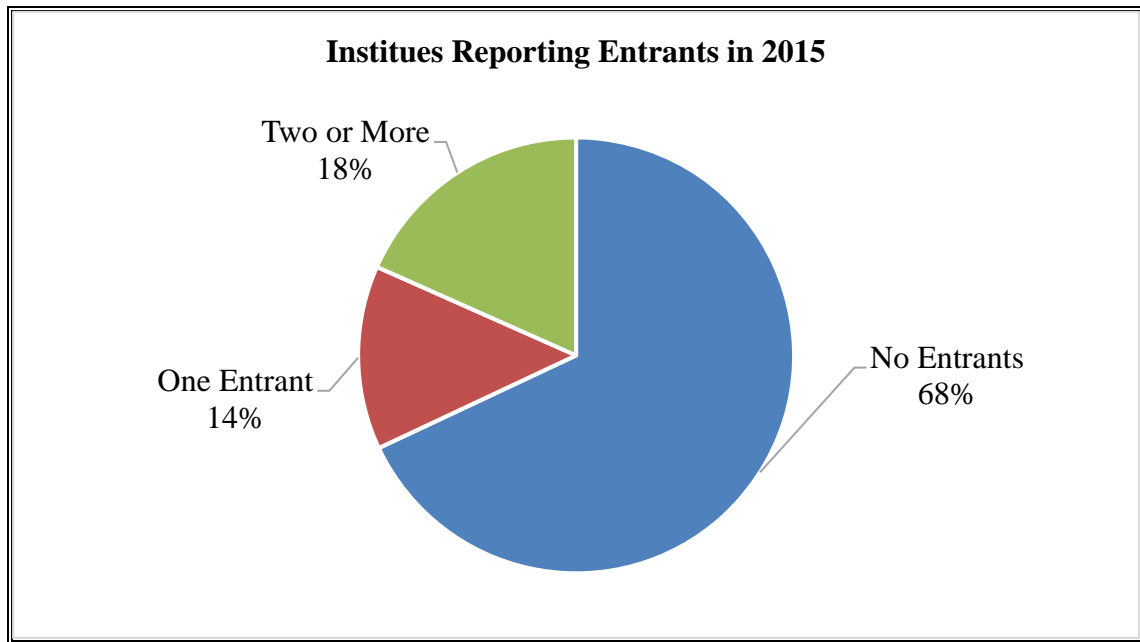
Many of the questions on the survey use four-point response scales (for example, “not at all,” “a little,” “somewhat,” and “very much” or “poor,” “fair,” “good,” and “excellent”). These scales allow half of the responses to be interpreted as relatively more “negative” (“poor” and “fair,” for example) and half as relatively more “positive” (“good” and “excellent,” for example). In parts of the analysis in this report, these responses are combined to allow for clearer comparisons. Tables summarizing responses to questions that use these scales usually report the percentage of those who responded to the two most positive categories combined (e.g., “somewhat” and “very much”), followed by a column of the percentage of those who responded in the most positive category (e.g., “very much”), 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.

Readers may also wish to compare the difference between the two extreme responses, say “poor” and “excellent,” to compare the level of intensity with which opposing opinions are held. These comparisons and others may be drawn by referring to the actual percentage responses given in Appendix I. That appendix shows the percentage responses for each item, calculated out of 100 percent, as well as the percentage of all respondents that did not respond to each question, separately calculated out of 100 percent for clarity of comparison.

In general, in making comparisons between men and women, tables will show the overall percentage who provided a positive response, followed by the percentage of each subgroup (i.e., men and women) who provided a positive response. Whenever the difference in percentages between these groups approaches or exceeds 10 percent, this difference is considered notable or important.

Institutes Reporting New Entrants in 2015

CARA asked the 790 religious congregations, provinces, or monasteries in the United States that were identified by LCWR, CMSWR, CSM, or the USCCB to provide the names of women and men (postulants or novices) who entered their religious institute in the United States in 2015. A total of 447 major superiors responded (57 percent) with 411 names of women and men. The Entrance Class of 2015 consists of 218 men (reported by CSM superiors), 120 women reported by CMSWR, 54 women reported by LCWR, and 19 new entrants into contemplative communities of women.



A total of 304 major superiors (68 percent of those responding) reported that they had no one enter the institute in 2015, another 61 major superiors (14 percent) reported one new entrant, and 82 major superiors (18 percent) reported from two to fifteen new entrants. Just six major superiors reported ten or more new entrants in 2015.

Age of Entering Religious Life

The average age of respondents of the Entrance Class of 2015 is 30. Half of the respondents are age 27 or younger.

Age of Women and Men Entering Religious Life			
Percentage in each age category			
	Overall	Women	Men
25 and younger	44%	42%	46%
Age 26-35	34	37	31
Age 36-45	13	11	15
Age 46-55	5	4	6
Age 56 and older	5	6	2
Average age	30	30	30
Median age	27	26	27
Range in years	18-61	18-60	18-61

The youngest responding sister or nun of the Entrance Class of 2015 is 18 and the oldest is 60 years of age. Two women reported entering at the age of 60. Among the men, the youngest is also 18, but the oldest is 61. One man entered at the age of 61. More than three-quarters of the respondents are 35 or younger.

Gender

Among the respondents who entered religious life in 2015, just over half (53 percent) are women and just under half (47 percent) are men. Among the men, four in five expect to become a priest and one in five expects to become a perpetually professed brother.

The 146 women who responded to the survey represent 59 religious congregations, provinces, or monasteries. Similarly, the 131 men who responded come from 50 different religious congregations, provinces, or monasteries of men religious.

Country of Birth and Age at Entry to United States

Four in five (81 percent) respondents were born in the United States.

Country of Birth			
Percentage in each category			
	Overall	Women	Men
United States	81%	77%	88%
Latin America	6	9	3
Asia	5	4	4
Africa	3	4	3
Europe	2	3	1
Canada	1	2	0
Australia	1	1	1

Vietnam and Mexico are the most frequently mentioned country of birth among respondents who were born outside the United States. These women and men identified a total of 26 different countries of origin.

Respondents who were born outside the United States have lived in the United States for an average of 12 years. Half first came to live in the United States in 2003 or earlier.

Entrance to the United States				
	Year	Age at Entry		
	Overall	Overall	Women	Men
Mean	2002	22	20	25
Median	2003	21	15	25
Range	1960-2015	1-56	1-56	8-41

On average, responding foreign-born religious came to live in the United States at the age of 22. Half were age 21 or younger when they came to live in the United States. The oldest woman was 56 at the time she entered the United States and the oldest man was 41 at the time he entered the United States.

Race and Ethnic Background

Seven in ten who entered a religious institute report their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian, European American, or white.

Race and Ethnic Background			
Percentage in each category			
	Overall	Women	Men
Caucasian/European American/white	71%	74%	69%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	13	15	11
Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	9	5	11
African/African American/black	6	5	6
Native American	<1	0	1
Other	1	1	2

One in eight (13 percent) of the Entrance Class of 2015 identifies as Hispanic/Latino(a), and one in ten (9 percent) identifies as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian. One in twenty (6 percent) identifies as African, African American, or black.

Differences by Country of Birth

Eight in ten respondents (82 percent) are U.S. born, and two in ten (18 percent) were born outside the United States. Among respondents who identify themselves as Caucasian/European American/white, more than nine in ten (94 percent) are U.S. born. Just 6 percent were born outside the United States.

Among those identifying as Hispanic/Latino(a), a little more than half (56 percent) are U.S. born and four in ten (44 percent) are foreign born. Those identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian are split evenly between foreign born and U.S. born.

Family Background

More than nine in ten respondents (93 percent) have been Catholic since birth.

Catholic Background			
	Overall	Women	Men
Catholic since birth	93%	96%	89%
Became Catholic later in life	7	4	11

Those who came into full communion with the Catholic Church from another denomination came from a variety of faiths: Baptist, Evangelical, Lutheran, United Methodist, or identified themselves as Protestant or non-denominational.

Just over nine in ten respondents (93 percent) report that, when they were growing up, they had at least one parent who was Catholic. Three in four (75 percent) report that both parents were Catholic.

Religious Background of Respondents' Parents*			
	Overall	Women	Men
Both parents Catholic	75%	81%	67%
Neither parent was Catholic	6	3	11
Mother Catholic, father not	12	10	13
Father Catholic, mother not	7	6	9

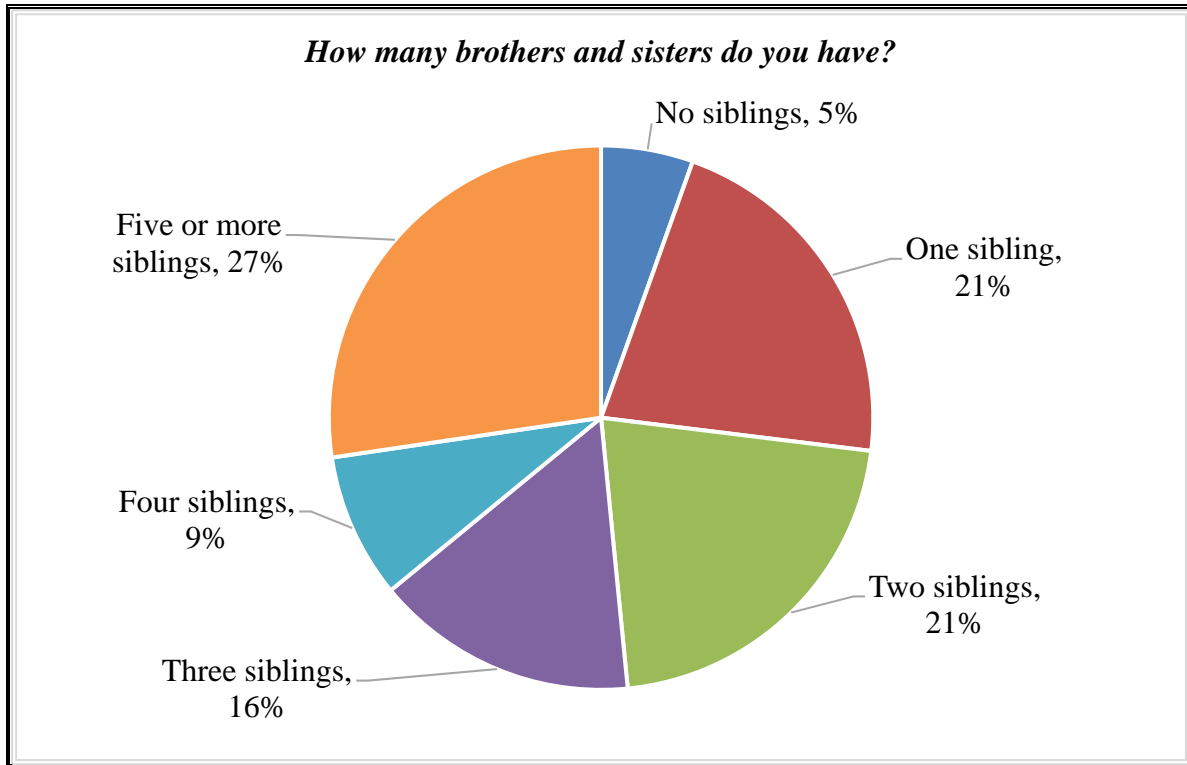
Respondents who had non-Catholic parents reported that they were either Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Evangelical, Baptist, Buddhist, generic Protestant, or non-denominational. Regardless of the religious tradition of their parents, six in ten respondents report that religion was “very important” to their mothers and four in ten report that religion was “very important” to their fathers. Another three in ten respondents report that religion was “somewhat important” to both their father and their mother while they were growing up.

Three in ten respondents (29 percent) report having a relative who is a priest or a religious. Almost two in three (64 percent) say that they got to know a priest or religious (other than a family member) while they were growing up.

Family Background While You Were Growing Up*	
Percentage responding “Yes”	
<i>Do you have a relative who is a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun?</i>	29%
<i>Outside of family members, while you were growing up did you ever get to know a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun?</i>	64
<i>Did your mother ever speak to you about a vocation to priesthood or religious life?</i>	26
<i>Did your father ever speak to you about a vocation to priesthood or religious life?</i>	19
<i>Did another family member ever speak to you about a vocation to priesthood or religious life?</i>	29
<i>Overall, was starting a discussion with your family about your vocation easy for you?</i>	55
*Percentages sum more than 100 because respondents could select more than one category.	

Just over a quarter of respondents report that their mother talked to them about a vocation to priesthood or religious life. About two in ten report that their father talked to them about a religious vocation. Overall, more than half say that it was easy for them to start a conversation with their family about their vocation. The responses to these questions is approximately the same among men and women of the Entrance Class of 2015.

Three in four members of the Entrance Class of 2015 have more than one sibling. One in five (21 percent) has one brother or sister and 37 percent report having two or three. More than one in three (36 percent) have four or more siblings.



On average, respondents have three siblings. Five percent from the Entrance Class of 2015 say they are an only child and only three respondents report ten or more brothers and sisters. The most common response to this question, among women and men, is one or two siblings.

What is your birth order?
Percentage in each category

	Overall	Women	Men
Middle	39%	39%	37%
Eldest	31	29	35
Youngest	25	27	23
Only child	5	5	5

Overall, respondents with siblings are a little more likely to be one of the middle children in their family. These entrants are more likely to be middle children (39 percent) than either the youngest or the oldest children (25 and 31 percent).

Education

Over half of those responding attended a parish-based religious education program and half (50 percent) attended a Catholic elementary or middle school. Two in five attended a Catholic high school and/or a Catholic college before entering their religious institute. Just over a quarter attended a Catholic ministry formation program before entering.

Catholic Education*			
Percentage responding			
	Overall	Women	Men
Catholic elementary or middle school	50%	51%	50%
Catholic high school	39	37	43
Catholic college/university	40	34	46
Catholic ministry formation program	27	31	23
Parish-based religious education	54	52	58
Home-schooled	12	15	8

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

Members of the Entrance Class of 2015 are about as likely as other U.S. Catholics to have attended a Catholic elementary school. In a 2012 national poll conducted by CARA,² 46 percent of U.S. adult Catholics report having attended a Catholic elementary school, compared to 50 percent among these respondents. Respondents of 2015 are more likely than other U.S. adult Catholics to have attended a Catholic high school (39 percent of respondents, compared to 22 percent of U.S. adult Catholics) and much more likely to have attended a Catholic college/university (40 percent of respondents, compared to just 6 percent of U.S. adult Catholics). Women and men are equally likely to have attended a Catholic elementary or middle school (51 percent for women compared to 50 percent for men), or a Catholic high school (43 percent for men compared to 37 percent for women). Men are more likely than women, however, to have attended a Catholic college before entering their religious institute (46 percent for men compared to 34 percent for women).

Whether or not they ever attended a Catholic elementary or high school, more than half of the respondents (54 percent) participated in a religious education program in their parish. Among respondents who said they participated in a religious education program in their parish, 63 percent did *not* report attending a Catholic elementary school and 75 percent did *not* attend a Catholic high school.

One in ten (12 percent) respondents report being home schooled at some time in their educational background. Among those who were home schooled, the average length of time

²CARA *Catholic Poll*. Summer 2012. Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

they were home schooled was eight years (an average of eight years for women and five years for men). More women than men report being home schooled (15 percent of women compared to 8 percent of men).

The responding members of the Entrance Class of 2015 are highly educated. Seven in ten earned an undergraduate or graduate degree before entering their religious institute.

Highest Education Completed Before Entering			
Percentage responding			
	Overall	Women	Men
High school or less	8%	7%	9%
Some college	18	21	15
Associate	2	2	1
Undergraduate degree	49	49	51
Graduate degree	21	20	24

About one in ten (8 percent) of the Entrance Class of 2015 completed high school or less before entering their religious institute. One in five (18 percent) completed some college before entering. A very small number of respondents completed an associate’s degree before entering. One-half (50 percent) had an undergraduate degree and more than one in five (22 percent) had a graduate degree before entering their religious institute. Responding men are just a little more likely than women to have an undergraduate degree or a graduate degree before entering their religious institute.

Participation in Religious Programs, Activities, or Ministries

Many respondents were active in parish life and/or other religious programs or activities before entering their religious institute. Nearly all respondents (94 percent) participated in at least one of these programs or activities before entering.

Participation in Religious Programs or Activities*			
Percentage checking each response			
	Overall	Women	Men
Retreats	76%	81%	70%
Other volunteer work in a parish/other setting	65	69	62
Campus ministry during college	50	48	52
Parish youth group during high school years	46	49	43
Parish young adult group	38	39	37
Right to Life March on Washington	36	41	32
Parish youth group during elementary or middle school years	30	28	32
World Youth Day	15	23	7
Religious institute volunteer program	14	14	14
National Catholic Youth Conference	8	9	7

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

- About three in four (76 percent) respondents participated in retreats. Nearly half (46 percent) participated in a parish youth group during their high school years. About two in five (38 percent) participated in a parish young adult group. Women are more likely than men to have participated in retreats.
- Two in three (65 percent) participated in various types of voluntary work in a parish or other setting. More than one in ten (14 percent) participated in a volunteer program with a religious institute. Half participated in campus ministry during college.
- A little more than a third (36 percent) participated in a Right to Life March in Washington. Women were more likely than men to have had this experience. About one in seven (15 percent) participated in World Youth Day. Women were three times as likely to participate as men.
- About a third of respondents participated in parish youth group during their elementary or middle school years. Men were more likely than women to have this experience. Just under one in ten participated in a National Catholic Youth Conference.

A great majority of respondents (84 percent) served in one or more specified ministries before entering their religious institute, either in a paid ministry position or as a volunteer. The most common ministry service reported was liturgical ministry (e.g., lector, extraordinary minister), followed by some form of faith formation.

Ministry Experience*			
Percentage checking each response			
	Overall	Women	Men
Liturgical ministry (lector, etc.)	64%	61%	68%
Faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA	46	49	44
Music ministry, cantor, or choir	41	45	37

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

- Among the ministries listed on the survey, respondents were most likely to report that they served in liturgical ministry roles, such as lector or extraordinary minister of communion. Men were slightly more likely than women to have served in this capacity.
- Almost one-half reported serving in faith formation, catechetical ministry, or RCIA (46 percent). Another two in five (41 percent) served in music ministries, such as cantor or in a choir, before entering their religious institute. Women were a little more likely than men to have served in these ministries.

Consideration of a Vocation to Religious Life

On average, respondents were 19 years old when they first considered a vocation to religious life.

Age When First Considered a Vocation to Religious Life			
	Age		
	Overall	Women	Men
Mean	19	18	19
Median	19	18	19
Range	3-59	4-59	3-48

Entrants to religious life were asked how much encouragement they received from various people when they first considered entering a religious institute. Respondents most frequently mentioned members of the institute (97 percent), vocational director/team (96 percent) and/or spiritual director (95 percent) as at least “somewhat” encouraging to them when they first considered entering a religious institute.

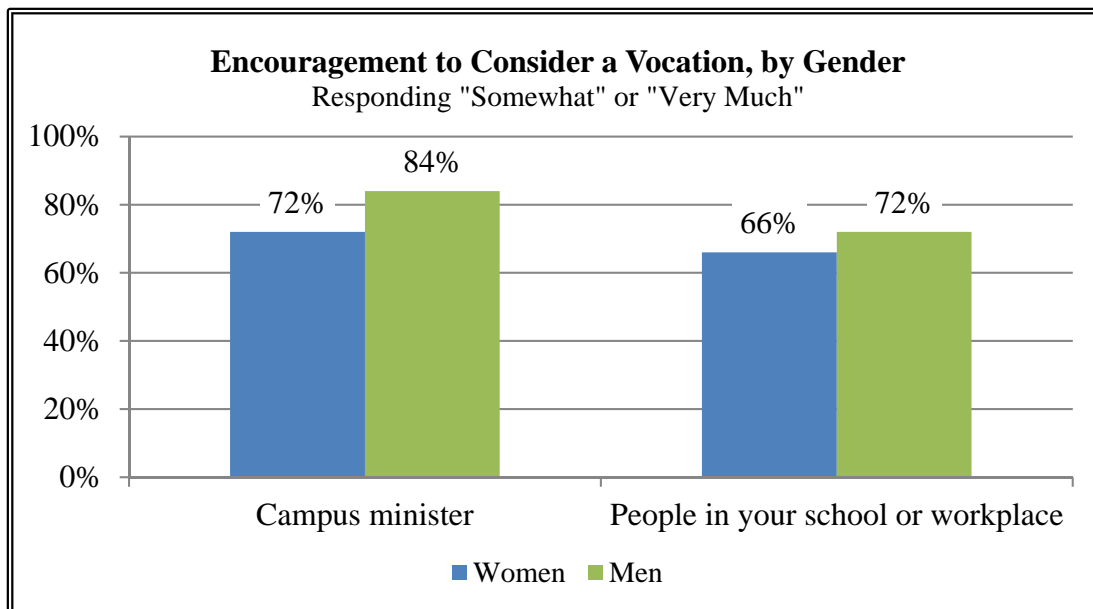
<i>How much encouragement did you receive from these when you first considered entering a religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very”	“Very much” Only
Members of your institute	97%	75%
Vocation director/team	96	76
Spiritual director	95	76
Other men and women religious	87	66
People in your parish	81	56
Friends outside the institute	81	50
Diocesan priests	80	53
Campus minister	78	61
People in your school or workplace	69	37
Your parents	65	43
Your siblings	62	31
Other family members	55	26

- More than four in five respondents entering religious congregations report being encouraged at least “somewhat” by these people: Other men and women religious (87 percent), people in the parish (81 percent), friends outside the institute (81 percent), and diocesan priests (80 percent).
- Nearly as many (78 percent) were at least “somewhat” encouraged by campus ministers. Seven in ten (69 percent) received encouragement from people in school or in their workplace.
- Half to two-thirds report receiving at least “some” encouragement from parents and family members when they first considered entering a religious institute: parents (65 percent), siblings (62 percent), and other family members (55 percent).

Comparisons by Gender

There is little difference between men and women in the encouragement they received from other members of their institute, their vocation director/team, their spiritual director, other men and women religious, the people in their parish, or friends outside the institute.

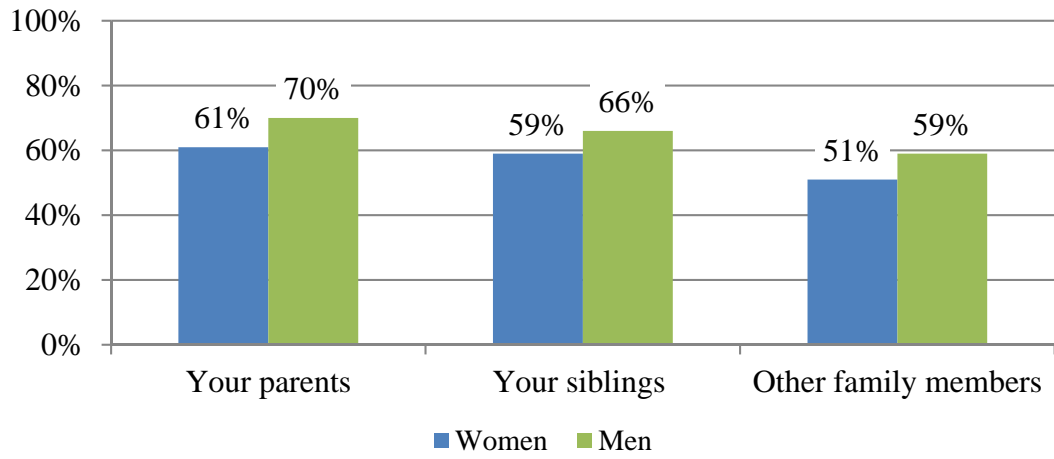
Men are a little more likely than women to report receiving encouragement from a campus minister (84 percent for men compared to 72 percent for women) or from people in their school or workplace (72 percent for men compared to 66 percent for women).



Men are also a little more likely than women to report receiving encouragement from parents (70 percent for men compared to 61 percent for women), siblings (66 percent for men compared to 59 percent for women), or other family members (59 percent for men compared to 51 percent for women).

**Encouragement from Parents and Family Members,
by Gender**

Responding "Somewhat" or "Very Much"



Attraction to Religious Life

Nearly all respondents were “somewhat” or “very much” attracted to religious life by a desire for prayer and spiritual growth (96 percent) and a sense of call to religious life (95 percent). Eight in ten or more were “very” attracted by these.

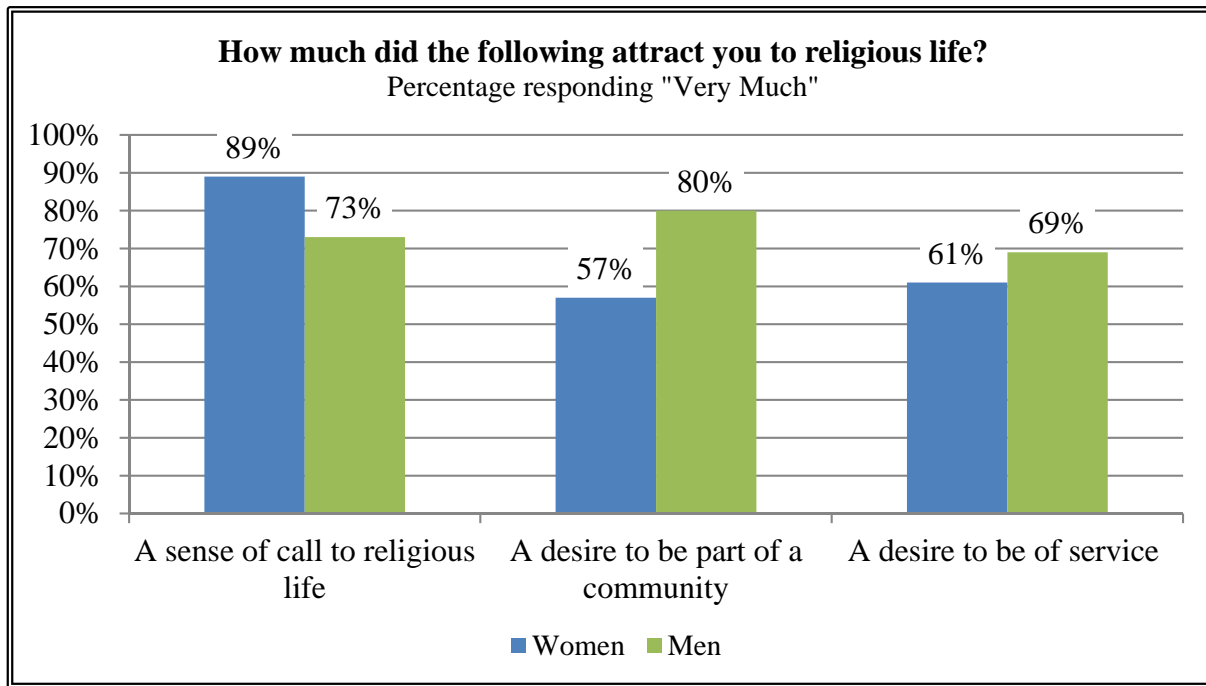
<i>How much the following attract you to religious life?</i>		
Percentage responding “Somewhat” or “Very Much”		
	“Somewhat” or “Very Much”	“Very Much” Only
A desire for prayer and spiritual growth	96%	79%
A sense of call to religious life	95	82
A desire to be of service	91	65
A desire to be part of a community	87	58
A desire to be more committed to the Church	81	53

- Nine in ten (91 percent) were at least “somewhat” attracted to religious life by a desire to be of service and about as many (87 percent) were attracted by a desire to be part of a community. About six in ten or more said each of these attracted them “very much.”
- Four in five (81 percent) were at least “somewhat” attracted to religious life by a desire to be more committed to the Church. More than half said this attracted them “very much.”

Comparisons by Gender

Men and women were equally likely to be at least “somewhat” attracted to religious life by each of these items.

At the same time, women were more likely than men to report they were “very much” attracted to religious life by a sense of call to religious life.



Men, on the other hand, were more likely than women to report that they were “very much” attracted to religious life by a desire to be part of a community or by a desire to be of service.

Attraction to Their Religious Institute

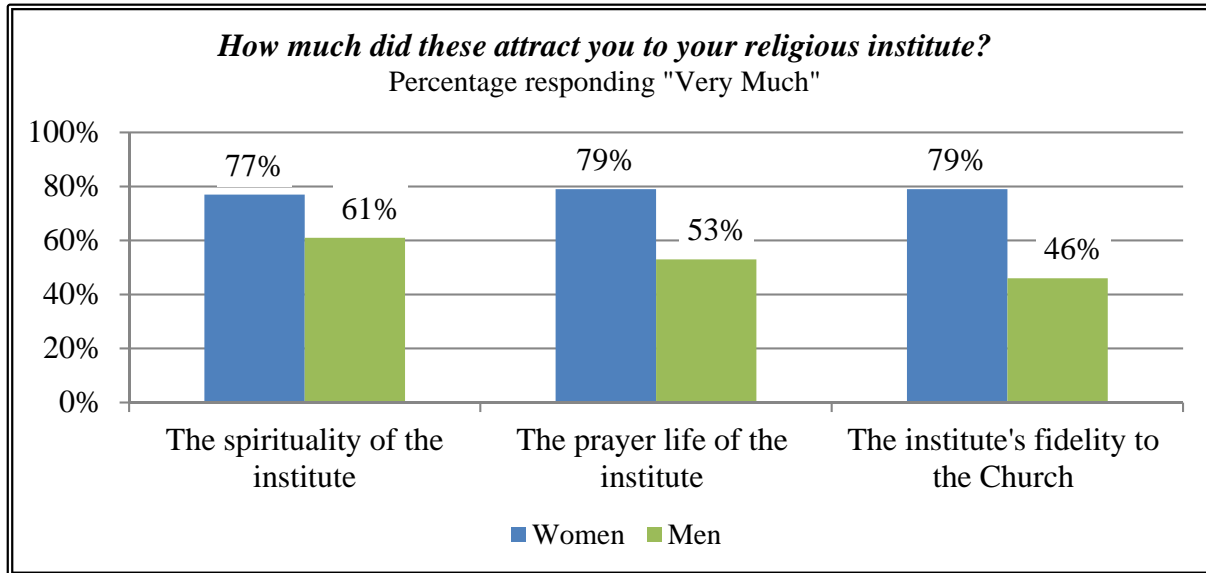
Entrants were asked how much each of several aspects of religious life attracted them to their particular religious institute. Nearly all (95 percent) reported that they were at least “somewhat” attracted by the spirituality of the institute.

<i>How much did these attract you to your religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very Much”	“Very Much” Only
The spirituality of the institute	95%	70%
The mission of the institute	93	67
The community life of the institute	93	67
The prayer life of the institute	92	67
The example of members of the institute	92	70
The ministries of the institute	91	61
The institute’s fidelity to the Church	86	64
Welcome and encouragement by members	84	59
The life and works of your founder/ress	78	46
A personal invitation by a member	53	29

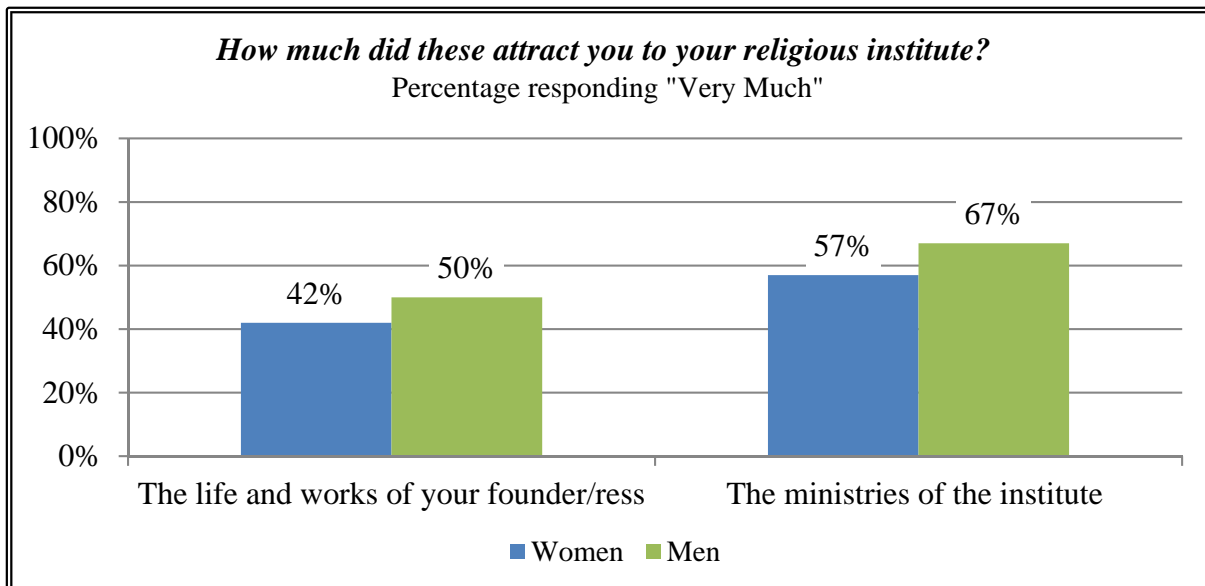
- More than nine in ten respondents report they were at least “somewhat” attracted to their religious institute by the mission of the institute (93 percent), the community life of the institute (93 percent), the prayer life of the institute (92 percent), the example of members of the institute (92 percent), and the ministries of the institute (91 percent).
- More than two in three report that they were “very” attracted to their institute by its spirituality (70 percent), the example of its members (70 percent), the community life of the institute (67 percent), or the mission of the institute (67 percent).
- Four in five or more were at least “somewhat” attracted to their religious institute by the institute’s fidelity to the Church (86 percent), by the welcome and encouragement of members (84 percent), or by the example of the life and works of the founder or foundress (78 percent).
- More than half report they were attracted by a personal invitation by the institute’s member (53 percent). Three in ten say this attracted them “very much.”

Comparisons by Gender

Women were more likely than men to report that they were at least “somewhat” attracted to their religious institute by the institute’s fidelity to the Church (91 percent for women compared to 79 percent for men).



Women were more likely than men to report that they were “very much” attracted to their religious institute by the spirituality of the institute, the prayer life of the institute, or the institute’s fidelity to the Church.



Men were a little more likely than women to say that they were “very much” attracted to their religious institute by the life and works of the founder/foundress or the ministries of the institute.

Initial Acquaintance with the Religious Institute

Men and women entering religious life were asked to indicate how they first became acquainted with their religious institute. Respondents were equally likely to report that they first became acquainted with their institute through an institution where members served, e.g., school or through their own internet search.

<i>How did you first become acquainted with your religious institute?*</i>			
Percentage checking each response			
	Overall	Women	Men
In an institution where members served, e.g., school	34%	21%	50%
Through your own internet search	33	33	33
Through the recommendation of a friend or advisor	29	35	23
Through the reputation or history of the institute	25	19	32
Through a relative or a friend in the institute	19	15	21
Through working with a member of the institute	17	10	23
Through web or social media promotional materials	13	14	9
Through an event sponsored by the institute	10	9	10
Through a media story about the institute or member	9	11	6
Through a vocation match or placement service	7	3	10
Through print promotional materials	7	5	8
Through a vocation fair	5	5	5
Other	24	22	25

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

- Less commonly, about a quarter of respondents indicate that they first became acquainted with their institute through the recommendation of a friend or advisor (29 percent), or through the reputation or history of the institute (25 percent).
- One in five or less learned about their institute through a relative or a friend in the institute (19 percent) or through working with a member of the institute (17 percent).

Comparisons by Gender

- Women and men are equally likely to report that they first became acquainted with their religious institute through an internet search (33 percent for each).
- Men are more likely than women to have become acquainted with their religious institute through in an institution where members served, e.g., school (50 percent for men compared to 21 percent for women), or through the reputation or history of the institute (32 percent for men compared to 19 percent for women).

- Women are more likely than men to report becoming acquainted with their religious institute through the recommendation of a friend or advisor (35 percent for women compared to 23 percent for men).
- A quarter (24 percent) first became acquainted with their religious institute through some other means (often during their college years). Some of those “other” responses included:
 - *A friend gave me recorded talks of our mother foundress*
 - *A sister posted on my friend's Facebook wall. On Facebook, I discovered Sr. Monica, who was a friend of a friend, and messaged her to ask about her community. She was a young adult like me, so I wanted to know more.*
 - *A sister was in the hospital where I was a chaplain, she invited me to be an associate. I was an associate for ten years and decided to take a big step to become a sister.*
 - *Church bulletin*
 - *Coincidental encounter*
 - *Divine revelation*
 - *Dorm visit at college*
 - *Event at parish.*
 - *EWTN episode on vocations*
 - *Focus Conference*
 - *Fr. James Martin*
 - *Gift shop of institute*
 - *I was a volunteer coordinator, the president of the group recommended volunteers with the Little Sisters of the Poor*
 - *I was a volunteer with the sisters and entered after that*
 - *Image of sisters on Facebook*
 - *In prayer*
 - *Jesuit Volunteer Corps*
 - *March for Life*
 - *Meeting a sister of my institute at a young adult Catholic Retreat*
 - *Member of the institute spoke at my commencement from college*
 - *Members of the institute visited my university and had a small evening event with women*
 - *Men discernment group at my university*
 - *Met a friar, was impressed and attracted to his way of life*
 - *Met religious on a women's retreat*
 - *Notre Dame Vision summer conference for high school students*
 - *Nun Run*
 - *Personal invitations*
 - *Poor Clare in Costa Rica*
 - *Prayer-revelation in prayer*
 - *Priest at college*
 - *Reading about members in college courses*

- *Reading lives of the saints*
- *Religious habit and cross*
- *Retreat center*
- *Saints of the order*
- *Secular books*
- *Seven Story Mountain*
- *Spiritual director*
- *St. Therese of Lisieux*
- *Summer mission*
- *Talks at campus ministry (diocesan) by members of institute*
- *They sent me a letter in the mail*
- *Through a children's magazine published by the community*
- *Through a friend who volunteered with ministry the institute worked with*
- *Through a parish priest*
- *Through a retreat in which a member was my spiritual leader*
- *Through a volunteer year sponsored by the institute*
- *Through friends*
- *Through meeting a member of the community at a youth retreat.*
- *Through my Oblate parish*
- *Through our Lord in the Eucharist/the Diary written by St. Faustina (who was in this order)*
- *Through the parish event*
- *While attending a conference/retreat*
- *World Youth Day*

Vocation/Discernment Programs and Experiences

Entrants were asked how helpful each of several vocation experiences were to them in discerning their call to their institute before they entered. Among the vocation programs and experiences about which they were asked, respondents were most likely to report that contact with a vocation director (82 percent) or contact with institute members (81 percent) prior to entering their religious institute were at least “somewhat” helpful.

<i>If you participated in any of the following with your religious institute before you entered, how helpful were these to you in discerning your call to your institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very”	“Very” Only
Contact with vocation director	82%	67%
Contact with institute members	81	59
“Come and See” experience	70	56
Visit(s) to local community/ies	62	46
Spiritual direction	59	47
Vocation or discernment retreat	58	45
Visit(s) to the Motherhouse	49	40
Live in experience	47	39
Ministry with institute members	38	25
Social media (e.g. Facebook)	35	14
Mission experience	23	13
Meeting with a discernment group	19	12
“Andrew Dinner” or “Nun Run”	9	6

- More than two-thirds of respondents found “Come and See” experiences at least “somewhat” helpful in discerning their call to their institute. More than half (56 percent) say these were “very” helpful.
- About three in five respondents report that visits to local communities, vocation or discernment retreats, or spiritual direction was at least “somewhat” helpful in discerning their call to their religious institute.
- About half found visits to the Motherhouse or a live in experience at least “somewhat” helpful before they entered their religious institute.
- Respondents were about equally likely to report that ministry with institute members or social media were at least “somewhat” helpful to them (38 percent and 35 percent respectively). However, respondents were more likely to report that ministry with

institute members was “very” helpful (25 percent) than to report that social media was “very” helpful (14 percent).

- Mission experience was at least “somewhat” helpful to about a quarter, while one in five found meeting with a discernment group to be as helpful. Even fewer (9 percent), report that they found an “Andrew Dinner” or “Nun Run” helpful in discerning their call to their institute. Only about a tenth or fewer found these experiences “very” helpful.

Comparisons by Gender

If you participated in any of the following with your religious institute before you entered, how helpful were these to you in discerning your call to your institute?
 Percentage responding “Somewhat” or “Very” helpful

	Overall	Women	Men
Contact with vocation director	82%	84%	81%
Contact with institute members	81	82	80
“Come and See” experience	70	74	64
Visit(s) to local community/ies	62	55	70
Spiritual direction	59	60	59
Vocation or discernment retreat	58	58	59
Visit(s) to the Motherhouse	49	72	20
Live in experience	47	50	45
Ministry with institute members	38	41	35
Social media (e.g. Facebook)	35	41	30
Mission experience	23	25	21
Meeting with a discernment group	19	18	22
“Andrew Dinner” or “Nun Run”	9	11	8

- Women are more likely than men to report that participating in a “Come and See” experience was helpful (74 percent for women compared to 64 percent for men). On the other hand, men were more likely than women to report that visits to local communities was helpful (70 percent for men compared to 55 percent for women).
- Women were more likely than men to report that visits to the Motherhouse were helpful (72 percent for women compared to 20 percent for men). Note, however, that men’s congregations are much less likely to have a Motherhouse. Close to half of respondents (46 percent) responded “Not Applicable” to this question.
- Women were also more likely than men to find social media helpful (41 percent for women compared to 30 percent for men) in discerning their call to their current institute.

Influences on Decisions to Enter Religious Institutes

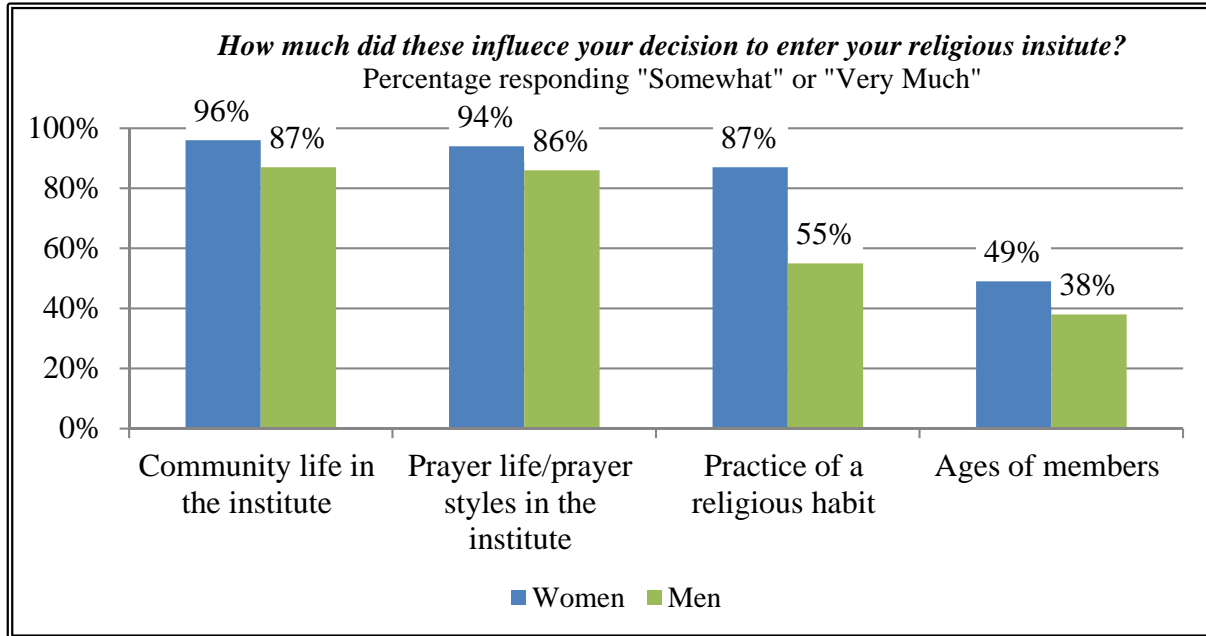
Entrants were asked how much influence various aspects of their religious institute had on their decision to enter that institute. Community life and prayer life/prayer styles in the institute were the most common aspects that respondent report being at least “somewhat” influential on their decision to enter their religious institute.

<i>How much these influence your decision to enter your religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very Much”	“Very Much” Only
Community life in the institute	91%	69%
Prayer life/prayer styles in the institute	90	66
The lifestyles of members	88	58
The types of ministry of its members	86	55
Its practice regarding a religious habit	72	51
Its internationality	50	25
The size of the institute	48	14
Its geographic location(s)	47	21
The ages of members	43	15
The racial/ethnic background of members	20	7

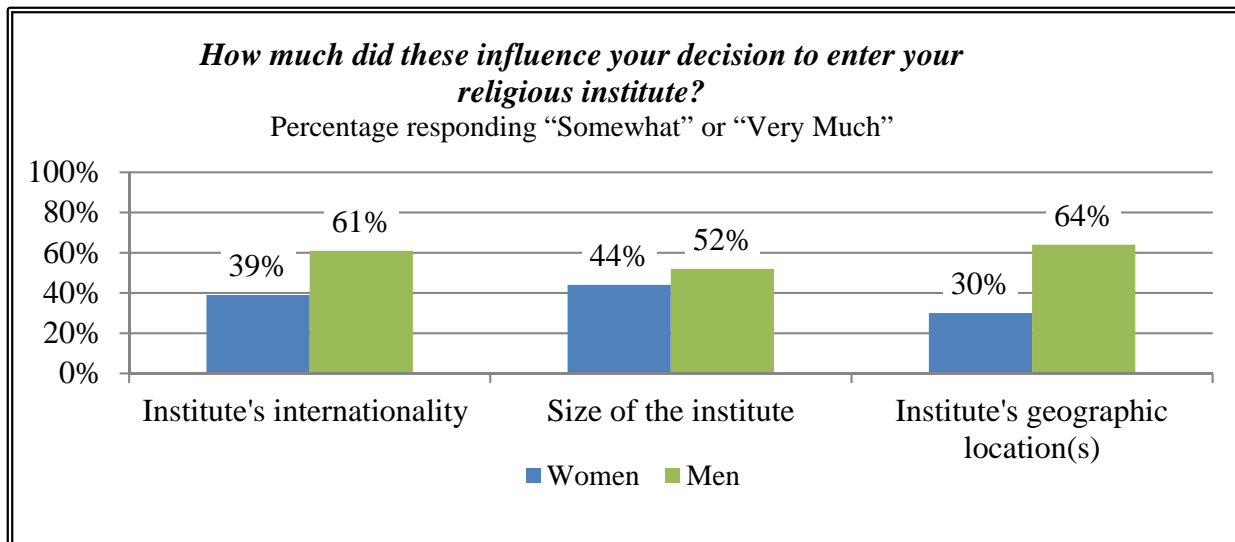
- Nearly nine in ten (88 percent and 86 percent) report that the lifestyles of members and the types of ministry of its members were at least “somewhat” influential to their decision to enter their institute. More than half say these were “very” influential.
- Seven in ten (72 percent) report that the institute’s practice regarding a religious habit influenced their decision to enter their institute at least “somewhat.” Half say this was “very” influential.
- Half of respondents indicate that the institute’s internationality (50 percent), its size (48 percent) or its geographic location (47 percent) influenced them at least “somewhat” in their decision to enter their institute. Four in ten (43 percent) say that the ages of members influenced them at least “somewhat.”
- Four in five (80 percent) respondents report that the racial/ethnic background of members had little or no influence on their decision to enter their institute.

Comparisons by Gender

Women were a little more likely than men to report that community life in the institute or the prayer life/prayer styles in the institute at least “somewhat” influenced their decision to enter their religious institute.



Women were much more likely than men to indicate that the institute’s practice regarding a religious habit influenced them at least “somewhat.” Similarly, women were more likely than men to report that the ages of members influenced them at least “somewhat.”



Men, on the other hand, were more likely than women to report that the institute’s internationality, the size of the institute, and the institute’s geographic location at least “somewhat” influenced their decision to enter their religious institute.

Prayer Practices

Respondents were asked to evaluate how important each of these different types of prayer are to them.

<i>How important to you are these types of prayer?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very”	“Very” Only
Private personal prayer	100%	92%
Daily Eucharist	97	89
Liturgy of the Hours	92	68
Eucharistic Adoration	88	72
Other devotional prayers, e.g. rosary	80	53
Faith sharing	76	41
Common meditation	66	33
Non-liturgical common prayer	64	23

- All respondents indicate that private personal prayer is “somewhat” or “very” important to them. More than nine in ten respondents say that private personal prayer is “very” important to them. Almost as many indicate that daily Eucharist is “very” important to them.
- Other prayer practices, such as Liturgy of the Hours or Eucharistic Adoration, is at least “somewhat” important to about nine in ten respondents. The rosary or other devotional prayers are similarly important to four in five and faith sharing is as important to three in four.
- Respondents also indicate that common meditation and non-liturgical common prayer are somewhat less important to them. Just about one-third of respondents say that common meditation and non-liturgical common prayer are “very” important to them.

Comparisons by Gender

There is no difference between men and women in the level of importance for private personal prayer or daily Eucharist. Women are generally a little more likely than men, however, to indicate that the various other types of prayer practices are “somewhat” or “very” important to them.

Prayer Practices		
Percentage responding “Somewhat” or “Very”		
	Women	Men
Private personal prayer	99%	99%
Daily Eucharist	96	97
Liturgy of the Hours	96	86
Non-liturgical common prayer	72	50
Common meditation	72	55
Eucharistic Adoration	92	81
Other devotional prayers, e.g., rosary	84	75
Faith sharing	73	76

- Women are more likely than men to report that Liturgy of the Hours, non-liturgical common prayer, and common meditation are more “somewhat” or “very important” to them.
- Women are also more likely than men to indicate Eucharistic Adoration and other devotional prayers, such as the rosary, are “somewhat” or “very” important to them.

Aspects of Community Life

Entrants to religious life were asked to indicate the importance to them of various aspects of community life. Nearly all respondents report these aspects of community are at least “somewhat” important to them.

<i>How important to you are these aspects of community life?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very”	“Very” Only
Living with other members	97%	83%
Praying with other members	96	85
Socializing/sharing leisure time together	96	77
Sharing meals together	95	79
Working with other members	92	65

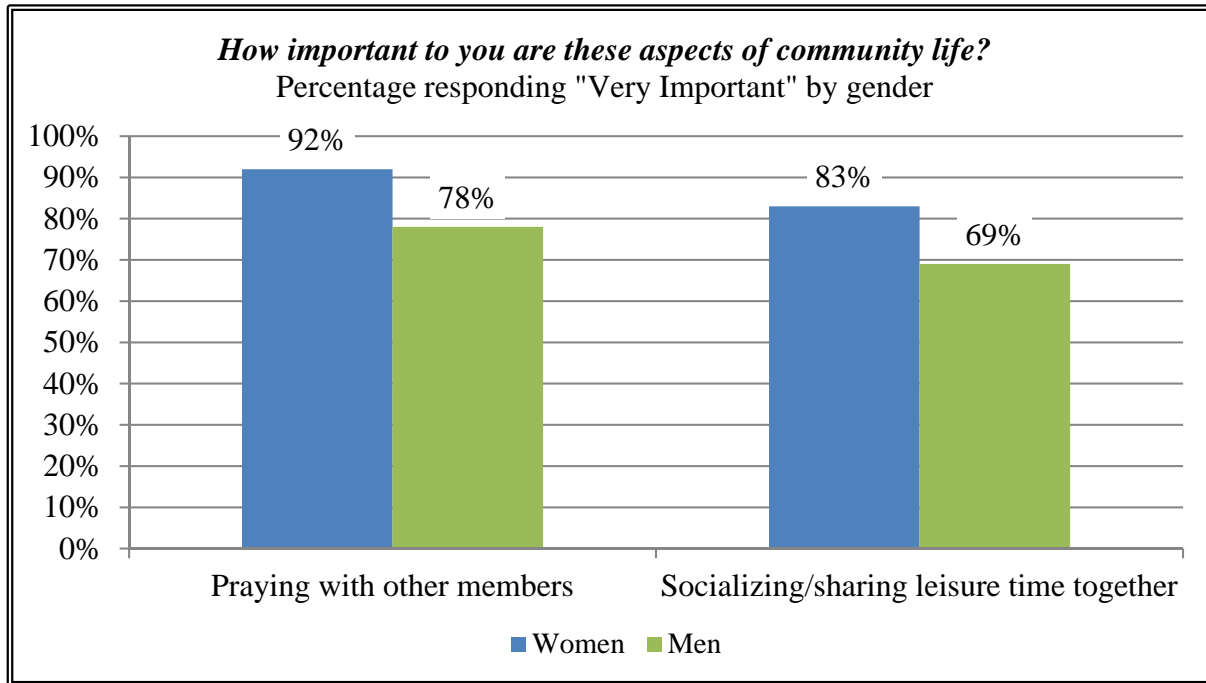
- More than four in five report that living with other members (83 percent) and praying with other members (85 percent) are “very” important to them.
- A little more than three in four respondents reported that sharing meals together (79 percent) and socializing/sharing leisure time together (77 percent) are “very” important to them.
- Two in three respondents (65 percent) reported that working with other members is “very” important to them.

Comparisons by Gender

In general, women and men entrants were equally likely to report each of these aspects of community life as at least “somewhat” important to them.

- Nearly all women report that living and praying with other members, sharing meals together, and socializing/sharing leisure time together are at least “somewhat” important to them. About nine in ten men religious reported these aspects were at least “somewhat” important to them.
- Women are slightly more likely than men (96 percent compared to 88 percent) to report that working with other members is at least “somewhat” important to them.

- At the same time, women are more likely than men to report that praying with other members and socializing/sharing leisure time together are “very” important to them.

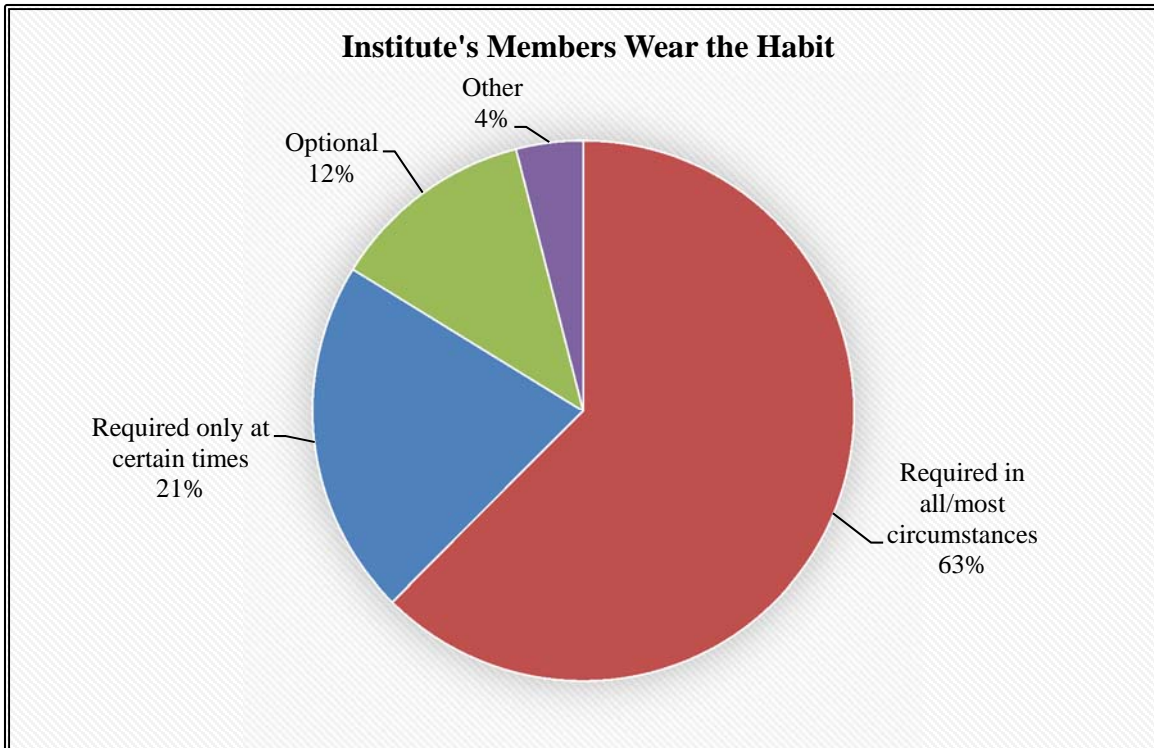


Practice of Religious Habit

New entrants were asked if the members of their institute wear a habit. Eight in ten indicate that the members of their institute wear a habit. About nine in ten women and three in four men indicate that members of their institute wear a habit.

<i>Do members of your institute wear a habit?</i>			
Percentage responding "Yes" or "No"			
	Overall	Women	Men
Yes	82%	88%	76%
No	18	12	24

Among those who indicate that members wear a habit, more than six in ten indicate that the habit is required in all or most circumstances.



- One in five reports that the habit is required only at certain times. A little more than one in ten reports that wearing habit is optional in their institute.
- Only seven respondents report that their members wear habits for other reasons, including:
 - At the discretion of the individual
 - I'm not clear about it
 - It seems discouraged
 - I don't know
 - Depending on work (Outside or inside institution)
 - A choice – habit modified dress
 - Technically required, but people ignore that and treat it as optional

Among the 12 percent indicating that wearing the habit is optional, very few responded to the follow-up question “How many members wear it all or most of the time?” Six respondents report that none of the members wear the habit all the time, 13 indicate that a few members (less than 25 percent) wear the habit all the time, five report that some (25-49 percent) members wear the habit all the time, one indicates that many (50-74) members wear it all the time, and two indicate most (75 or more percent) wear the habit all the time.

Among the 12 percent indicating that wearing the habit is optional, very few responded to the second follow-up question “How frequently do you wear it?” Nine respondents report that they wear it only at certain times (e.g., ministry, prayer), three say that they wear it once in a while, and seven indicate that they never wear it.³

³ This question only applies to novices, as postulants do not wear a habit and do not have the option to do so.

Aspects of the Religious Institute

Nearly all respondents rate their religious institute as “good” or “excellent” in each of the aspects shown in the table below.

<i>How would you rate these in your religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Good” or “Excellent”	“Excellent” Only
Faithfulness to prayer and spiritual growth	97%	82%
Commitment to ministry	98	79
Opportunities for spiritual growth	96	78
Fidelity to the Church and its teachings	96	78
Opportunities for personal growth	96	74
Welcome and support of newer members	95	80
Focus on mission	95	70
Opportunities for ongoing formation	95	59

- Four in five respondents report that their religious institute is “excellent” in its faithfulness to prayer and spiritual growth, its welcome and support of newer members, its commitment to ministry, and its fidelity to the Church and its teachings.
- Three in four report that their religious institute is “excellent” in its opportunities for personal growth. Seven in ten rate their institute as “excellent” in its focus on mission.
- Six in ten report that their institute is “excellent” in its opportunities for ongoing formation.

More than nine in ten respondents report that their religious institute is “good” or “excellent” in all but one of the following areas, as illustrated in the table below.

<i>How would you rate these in your religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Good” or “Excellent”	“Excellent” Only
Sense of identity as institute members	94%	72%
Sense of identity as religious	93	75
Quality of community life	93	65
Educational opportunities	93	64
Relationships with one another	93	61
Response to the needs of our time	92	70
Formation/incorporation programs	92	67
Communal prayer experiences	91	65
Preparation for ministry	91	55
Efforts to promote vocations	90	64
Efforts to promote social justice	84	50

- Three in four report rate their religious institute as “excellent” in the members’ sense of identity as religious.
- Seven in ten rate their religious institute as “excellent” in their sense of identity as institute members and their response to the needs of our time.
- Two in three rate the institute as highly in its formation/incorporation programs, the quality of community life, and in its communal prayer experiences. Almost two in three report that their religious institute is “excellent” in its educational opportunities and in its efforts to promote vocations.
- Half or slightly more report that their religious institute is “excellent” in its preparation for ministry and in efforts to promote social justice.

Comparisons by Gender

Women are a little more likely than men to rate their religious institute as at least “good” in these areas: responding to the needs of our time (97 percent for women compared to 85 percent for men), communal prayer experiences (95 percent for women and 86 percent for men), and efforts to promote social justice (90 percent for women and 77 percent for men).

As is shown in the table below, women were more likely than men to rate their religious institute as “excellent” in all areas except its educational opportunities.

*How would you rate these in your religious institute?**

Percentage responding "Excellent"

	"Excellent" Only	Women	Men
Faithfulness to prayer and spiritual growth	82%	92%	70%
Welcome and support of newer members	80	84	74
Commitment to ministry	79	84	72
Fidelity to the Church and its teachings	78	91	63
Opportunities for spiritual growth	78	85	69
Sense of identity as religious	75	85	63
Opportunities for personal growth	74	79	68
Sense of identity as institute members	72	78	65
Focus on mission	70	78	60
Response to the needs of our time	70	77	62
Formation/incorporation programs	67	73	59
Communal prayer experiences	65	79	49
Quality of community life	65	74	54
Efforts to promote vocations	64	73	54
Educational opportunities	64	57	72
Relationships with one another	61	69	51
Opportunities for ongoing formation	59	65	52
Preparation for ministry	55	59	50
Efforts to promote social justice	50	51	49

Women were more likely than men to indicate that their religious institute is "excellent" in its faithfulness to prayer and spiritual growth, in its fidelity to the Church and its teaching, and in its communal prayer experiences.

What Most Attracted You to Your Religious Institute?

New entrants were also invited to respond in their own words to an open-ended question “What most attracted you to your religious institute?” Respondents shared many aspects of this attraction, including communal prayer, community life, charisma, ministries, joy of the members, the clear mission, witness of members, fidelity to the Church, the founder or foundress of the institute, its practice regarding the habit, formation, and lifestyle. A few of their comments relative to each of these aspects are listed below. A full transcript of all open-ended responses is included in an appendix at the end of this report.

Prayer Life and Communal Prayer

Prayer is the most common aspect that respondents say attracted them to their religious institute. They were attracted by the communal prayers and various types of prayers, including daily Mass, Liturgy of the Hours, Eucharistic Adoration, daily rosary, and the Stations of the Cross. Some of their responses included:

- *Being able to devote all (or most) of my time to prayer without many worldly distractions.*
- *Daily Holy Hour, daily prayer in community of Liturgy of the Hours, daily mass.*
- *Devotions – rosary, Mercy Chaplet, days of fasting, praise and worship, Liturgy of the Hours, Eucharistic Adoration two times a day.*
- *I volunteered with the brothers after college. I lived with them as an Associate during that year. I grew so much closer to Christ that year – and really enjoyed life while doing so! Elements of that year which stand out are the growth in personal prayer (often within times of charismatic communal prayer).*
- *I was also attracted to their traditional Franciscan spirituality that was open to various expressions of prayer – devotional, ritual, charismatic renewal of praise and worship, etc.*
- *I was most attracted to my religious institute’s prayer life and focus on Eucharistic prayer.*
- *The prayer life of the community was very attractive to me and the sense that they are whole life, whether at work, or play, or in chapel they did it as religious brothers, their whole life was defined by that religious vocation.*
- *The rhythm of prayer – daily Mass, Liturgy of the Hours, Adoration chapel, daily Stations of the Cross, daily rosary, etc.*
- *The spirituality and prayer life of the community very much attracted me because it fit with my own spirituality and particular devotions that I developed. The prayer life of my*

community life also fit all the essentials that I listed for myself that I felt necessary for an institute to have should I enter it.

- *There are many things which attract me to the Dominican spirituality and personally resonate with me: The first is prayer and devotion to the Mother of God. I feel attracted to Dominican monastic prayer which is similar to general monastic prayer. However, Dominican monastic prayer includes the dimensions of praying for the salvation of souls and also the sharing of the fruits of contemplation. This is the Dominican focus of the contemplative prayer. I am aware that the nuns are allowed to share the fruits of their contemplation within community at the right times and through praying for the world.*
- *We are Eucharistic, meaning we recognize the Eucharistic heart of Jesus as the summit and source of our life. Every day, we receive Holy Communion at Mass and have an hour of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament exposed.*
- *What most attracted me to my institute was the communal prayer and the vitality of the community.*
- *What most attracted me was the contemplation [illegible] and the deep life of prayer.*
- *When I finally visited my institute for the first time on a retreat for young women, I got to participate in the institute's rich, liturgical prayers.*

Community Life

The second most common attraction that the responding new entrants report is the community and community life of the institute. The respondents indicate that community life and community activities really attracted them to their religious institute. Some of their responses included:

- *A sense of knowing that the men of my institute were committed to praying and living together as they seek to become more Christ-like and move on their way to God.*
- *I love the aspect of community life, of working on a team of men religious, women religious, and laity (families!). It is also a very diverse community with all ethnic backgrounds and all different ages and its members have different stories and testimonies and those discerning are not automatically written off because they are too old or have a rough past – which I have found to be the case with other communities.*
- *It was a community of lesser brothers rather than a group mired in clericalism and out of touch with the vast majority of the struggles ordinary folks go through on a daily basis.*
- *One thing that attracted me to this religious institute is its sense of brotherhood, that is, the sense of focus on community life.*

- *Seeing with what fraternal charity they love one another with, as well as how joyful the community is.*
- *The answer is the important emphasis placed on community life. Members of the Augustinian community are like family. Every member is constantly looking out for the common good of other members. The community prays together, eats together, works together, and plays together. I am the eldest of a family of eight, and I grew up knowing the importance of family. I believe that is why I respect the Augustinian's sense of community.*
- *The Benedictine charism of community life and service centered around the liturgical life and communal sharing of meals, recreation, meditation, etc. seeking a balanced, Gospel-based life among and with brothers.*
- *The community – it really feels like a place where the community can help me flourish as a human being and encourage my spiritual growth.*
- *The community bonds all served to really attract me, but what sealed the decision was what one sister said when she described their vocation: “We are Brides of Christ first. And from that relationship we can bring Christ to others in our ministry.”*
- *The joy and authenticity of our community/fraternal life.*
- *They are one of the few communities who came through the confusion of Vatican II still wearing a religious habit, living in community, and praying and eating together daily.*

Founder/Foundress, Spirituality, and Charism of the Institute

The founder/foundress, the spirituality, and the charism of the institute were other common factors that attracted respondents to their religious institute. They report how much the spirituality of their institute's founder or foundress inspired them and led to their decision to enter their religious institute. Some of their responses included:

- *Every aspect of our Marian charism, our mother foundress.*
- *I loved the specific charism of the congregation and their dedication to music and teaching and the general charism of the Dominican order.*
- *It matches closely with my specific charism, and my specific devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary. I like the fact that it is a missionary order too.*
- *Life and writings of our founder. Mission of the institute (and related educational opportunities). Charism of family (which bears on our community life greatly and on me in particular due to geographically proximity to family).*

- *Our Marian Charism of being image and presence of our Lord in the heart of the Church and to place this Marian Charism at the service of the Petrine principle. The completeness fullness of this charism: Eucharistic, Marian, Charismatic and full communion with the Church.*
- *Our Mother foundress, her wisdom and knowledge and the simplicity in her words.*
- *Some of the most important elements of my community that attracted me were their charism of constant conversion and their dedication to serving the spiritually and materially poor. I was also attracted to their traditional Franciscan spirituality that was open to various expressions of prayer – devotional, ritual, charismatic renewal of praise and worship, etc.*
- *Strong sense of mission, history and tradition, rich collection of writings from founders/foundress, comfort with sisters.*
- *The Benedictine spirituality of work, prayer, and leisure combined with a spirit of mission attracted me.*
- *The charism and spiritual formation, the clear understanding that who we are as religious is more important than our good works.*
- *The charism and spirituality – our totally Marian charism and that we live to console the pierced hearts of Jesus and Mary.*
- *The educational charism of my religious institute was initially most attractive. As I was able to visit a broad array of our ministries internationally and witness the way this educational charism is carried out in very impoverished areas of the world often in places where there are few Catholics and few Church institutions.*
- *The example of the founder, St. Francis, and a desire placed in my heart to encounter the poor.*
- *The founders St. John Bosco and St. Mary Mazzarello and the saints of the institute, the work of education to poor youth throughout the world.*
- *The life of our foundress: she had a “see the need, meet the need” attitude that continues to be lived in the community today.*
- *The stories of the founder and how he expressed his love for God through his interaction with the people of God.*
- *Their charism and communal life, their dedication to the Church and their Franciscan way of life all attracted me to my religious institute.*

- *This aspect of Dominican spirituality is also the mission of the Church. Dominican spirituality presently resonates with me because I experience a great desire to share the fruits of my contemplation with people, both to encourage them and to evangelize. St. Dominic's personal great love for the Mother of God also attracted me.*
- *What attracted me the most was the Marian charism of our Mother foundress. This means we are true mothers, we embrace our children with open arms. We are Eucharistic, and open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. What is most beautiful about our charism. It is a charism of love a charism of life that fosters a civilization of love and life.*
- *What attracted me to this community is the spirituality and charism of the Sisters of the Holy Family. In the spirit of our saintly foundress Henriette Delille. The sisters seek the will of God through daily prayers and model their lives on the example and teaching of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.*
- *What most attracted me to my religious institute was the founder and the charism. Also the mission of the institute.*

Sense of Mission and Ministries of the Institutes

Respondents also recognize the sense of mission and ministries of the institute as other attractive aspects that drew them to their religious institute. Some of their responses include:

- *A combination of the diverse ministries in which it carries out its mission – particularly the centrality of education in this – and the dedicated, joy-filled spirit I encountered in priests of this congregation.*
- *I find the mission very much in my line of interest but in living with the sisters before entering as a volunteer it was their commitment to a life set apart and their love of God, one another and the youth that made me realize that was a life I could love.*
- *I was attracted to their commitment of service, justice and the poor while always taking time for rest, laugh and leisure. The variety of ministries also attracted me to the Sisters of Mercy, including social workers, nurses, attorneys, professors, volunteers, foster mothers and ground level companionship with those on the streets.*
- *I was most attracted by its ministries to the disenfranchised and marginalized population.*
- *It was their mission – as a teaching community that resonated with me and made me realize that I was being called to join them. In other words, their charism and apostolate was such a perfect fit for how I desired to live my life, it seemed that by joining this order I could be the most happy.*

- *Ministry geared toward education and amount of ministry in education ... Mission oriented, varieties of ministries. Mission of evangelization – I wanted to tell people about Jesus explicitly and talk about faith, not work in healthcare, a school, or social justice.*
- *The apostolic mission of forming the hearts to build the civilization of true love and life, the heart of the church and the world.*
- *The main appeal is that you get to choose your own ministry. Our charism is simply to live the gospel making it very applicable to all sorts of opportunities.*
- *The ministry attracted me the most. To being the Incarnate Word to the world is both beautiful and necessary.*
- *Their sense of mission, and in particular their ability to find God everywhere – including social margins and cultural/intellectual frontiers, as well as their support of religious in ministry that are not conventionally religious settings (e.g. academia, journalism, the arts, etc.).*
- *What mainly attracted me to this order was their mission of caring for the elderly – and specifically as they pass to eternal life. With their values of family spirit and compassion, this community significantly restores the dignity of the human person and I knew it was a mission I wanted to be a part of.*
- *With the members, the congregation's focus of mission, especially in educational apostolates, attracted me.*

Joy of the Institute's Members

In addition, respondents were attracted to their religious institute by the joy of the members and their encounter with the members.

- *I grew up with an aunt who was part of this community. She had a joy and youthfulness about her that was attractive. When I grew older and had to consider more important factors, this community has 800 years of heritage of knowing who they are and being faithful to their mission.*
- *I was most attracted by the sisters' joy as they go about their ministry. They seemed to really become energized when surrounded by the young people. I was also very attracted to the ability to work with young people. As I already wanted to become an educator and find real fulfillment in working with youth, the Institute seemed very fitting to me.*
- *I was most attracted by the witness of the lives of those already in my congregation – their zeal, joy, commitment to community and passion for ministry.*

- *I was very attracted by the joy, authenticity, and witness of the members. I knew and could tell that these were truly joyful sisters who understood and lived out their vocation.*
- *It was their joy and fidelity to the Church and the Dominican charism that attracted me to my religious institute.*
- *More than anything else, I am attracted to this particular religious institute by the example of its members, and especially by their sense of joy and their living out their commitment to the Franciscan work of life and their zeal.*
- *Once I got to know the sisters, it was their joy that attracted me the most. I believe this is because their joy comes from Christ and flows out as maternal love.*
- *The first thing that I noticed about my community that differed from other communities was their radiant joy and love. You cannot be around my sisters without witnessing their passion, zeal, joy and love.*
- *The joy and feeling of family and brotherhood among the members is incredible, and obvious from an outsider perspective as well. Most importantly, was a strong feeling of “I belong here” and “this is for me.”*
- *The joy of the Sisters of St. Cecilia has always tugged at my heart. Their laughter, joy, smiles, and their deep relationships with each other as an effect of the intense relationship they have with Christ made me realize how deeply I desired this as well.*
- *The most attractive aspect was their joy and light that the sisters exuded. Wherever they went and in whatever they did, brought and shone forth the presence of God.*
- *The personality of the sisters and their joy in giving their entirety to God attracted me.*
- *The pure joy that they had for life. Whenever I went to talk to them about secular or religious topics they always had a smile and it was real. It was their genuine joyful attitude when interacting with me that first attracted me to the church even.*
- *The things that attracted me most to my religious institute were its contagious joy, family spirit, and genuine love for the youth. The sisters also made me feel welcomed and not pressured into deciding my vocation. They were unique and down to earth.*
- *Their joy and authenticity was extremely attractive. I felt called to a community which had a strong Eucharistic and Marian devotions as well as a focus on the new evangelization.*
- *What most attracted me to this religious institute was the life. I think the happiness the sisters have also drew me to the order. The happiness is unlike anything I can describe because it is not something of human fabrication. Their happiness comes from Our Lord who is our light and joy.*

Fidelity to the Church

Fidelity to the Church is another important aspect that several respondents report attracted them to their religious institute. Some of their responses include:

- *Fidelity to the Truth of the teachings of the Catholic Church – and preaching them to a world that no longer believes as a charism.*
- *I was attracted by the institute’s fidelity to the Church. The Dominicans’ commitment to praying the Divine Office in common and to maintaining a regular life both played big roles in my decision to join them.*
- *I was attracted most to the joy visible in the members and their fidelity to authentic Catholic education.*
- *I was most attracted to the fidelity to the Church, its orthodoxy.*
- *It was their joy and fidelity to the Church that attracted me to my religious institute.*
- *Its fidelity to the Church and her teachings, and its dedication to spreading the gospel, as exemplified by the lives of the members I knew.*
- *The fact that they are very faithful to the teachings of the Church.*
- *The institute's fidelity to the Church and essential elements of consecrated religious life.*
- *The orthodoxy and fidelity to the Church most attracted me to this religious institute.*
- *The very obvious, true love of Christ, fidelity to Him and His Church, and the apparent joy of being brides of Christ that the members all demonstrate attracted me very much to this institute.*

Social Justice

Other respondents report that their institute’s commitment to social justice attracted them. Some of their responses include:

- *Emphasis on social justice, advocacy, and outreach to those who are marginalized.*
- *I loved how committed to both the Church, the world they are. They are very balanced when it comes to fitting into the polarized Church in America. Overall, they feel with the Church. I would also say that their spirituality equally attracted me and is the primary reason we find such balance.*
- *The commitment to Church teaching and to sharing the gospel with the world.*

- *Their awareness about the questions of our time (social justice, ecology).*
- *Their commitment to social justice, caring for those in need, and responding to the needs of the time with love, compassion, and inclusivity.*

Religious Habit

In addition to the above-mentioned aspects, some respondents were attracted by the religious habit worn in their religious institutes. Some of their responses are:

- *A significant way to participate in the New Evangelization includes wearing a habit to be a witness of the joy and mission to which one has been called.*
- *I met the community by assisting at their cenacles, so the thing that attracted me most from the beginning was the habit.*
- *I was also looking for a community that wore a habit and was a visible sign for our Church.*
- *Being an African from Nigeria, where most religious wear white or blue habit, I was attracted to the neatness and immaculate appearance of their habit.*
- *The fact that they are very faithful to the teachings of the Church and wear a habit at all times made me first to entering.*
- *They are one of the few communities who came through the confusion of Vatican II still wearing a religious habit, living in community, and praying and eating together daily. I respected them for that.*
- *What first attracted me was that they were a community that wore the habit.*

Religious Formation

Finally, a number of respondents were attracted by the formation that they received in their religious institutes. Some of their responses are:

- *Formation was the best I could find. Education is excellent for the person entering.*
- *The high level of education and formation of the sisters and possibility of personal growth.*
- *Their true and complete and genuine human formation which leads to their identity as the image and presence of our lady in the heart of the Church and the heart of the world.*
- *Tremendous education/formation program.*

What Do You Find Most Challenging about Religious Life?

A second open-ended question asked new entrants to respond in their own words to “What do you find most challenging about religious life?” Respondents shared many things that challenge them in religious life, including community life, maturity, adaptation, lack of access to family, and other challenges. A few of their comments relative to each of these aspects are listed below. A full transcript of all open-ended responses is included in an appendix at the end of this report.

Community Life

Asked what was the most challenging about the religious life, the respondents most commonly report that they find community life the most challenging aspect of their religious life experience. They have learned that living in community may involve loss of privacy, as well as struggles in living with the members who have different cultural backgrounds, points of views, ages, personalities, and preferences. Some of their responses include:

- *At times I find it difficult to live in certain community situations, but I still consider community a blessing.*
- *Community has been a difficulty because there can be conflicting personalities in the house.*
- *Community life could sometimes be labor intensive. But what's more challenging than physical work of various apostolates we assist with is learning to live with people of diverse personalities, ages, ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds. Just as fostering a holy family in the marriage vocation requires learning how to share, compromise, and make sacrifices generously for the good of the others, building a good community in the religious vocation requires self-giving love – a love that entails an openness to being pruned, like a tree, so that we could bear more fruit for others.*
- *Community life is the greatest blessing and the biggest challenge. Learning to live with other men, especially during initial formation, is a process of knowing your own faults and shortcomings and attempting to perfect them for the sake of better community life.*
- *Community living can be challenging sometimes when I just want to spend some time alone or when I get frustrated with the “annoying habits” of the other members.*
- *I find the most challenging about religious life is living with people that you may not have anything in common, however, what I can always we accomplish through prayer and love for one’s neighbor.*
- *I have to say the biggest gift and challenge for me has been the community life. It is a large part of what attracted me to the religious life, and it still is. The vast differences in age, culture and interest can present challenges. What I thought I would find challenges*

(poverty, obedience) has most presented itself. Knowing we are sisters in common faith and mission keeps me comforted, even if the decision was not my first choice.

- *Living in community! Learning how to live and share life with others, especially after living on my own and taking my own independence and autonomy for granted.*
- *Living with other men who have never lived with others for a prolonged time. Takes a lot of practice living with people you've never met before.*
- *One of the most challenging things is to be patient with the various personalities and opinions of community and die to self. It is humbling and naturally no one is automatically able to do that perfectly.*

Maturing in Religious Life

Respondents also report the challenge of recognizing and addressing limitations in themselves and others, while desiring to grow in religious life. They regularly mentioned their difficulty in overcoming “myself,” “temptations,” “weakness,” and “sins.” Some of their responses include:

- *As a novice, the most challenging thing is the death of myself for the sake of love. It is our greatest glory to strive after a life given in perfect love to God and thus to all people. But it is also my greatest challenge to humbly confront my weakness, to patiently grow in virtue and renounce sin, to grow more and more surrendered in giving my property, my body and my will to God through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.*
- *At this point (two months in), I think the most challenging aspect of formation is the vulnerability of discovering/acknowledging the weaknesses, as well as the strengths, that I bring to community life.*
- *As a three-month-old postulant, the most challenging part of religious life – well, in this case, formation – is coming face to face with your faults and weaknesses and believing and trusting that God will work through all these things and transform them into something beautiful that will give him the praise and glory that is due.*
- *Dying to my own flesh. The spirit is willing but my flesh is weak. I can see where I need to go and want to go, but often my own desires, self-centeredness and will take precedence in my heart. Breaking old ways to be transformed into “behold I make all things new.” Self-examining my own heart to discover the areas that are not beautiful and trusting totally in God to “make all things possible.”*
- *For the short time I have been experiencing religious life so far, I have found the demand to grow most challenging. We in the Christian life should be constantly refining ourselves, and in religious life, this call for growth is taken very challenging, it is also the most rewarding.*

- *I find most challenging about religious life to avoid temptation and occasion of sin, living in difficult situations, obeying God through accepting the legitimate will of my superiors for me some difficult circumstances etc.*
- *I find the fact that I am now caused to face my faults/sinful desires instead of running away from them in the world most challenging part. It's a good challenge.*
- *Learning how to give up my own stubborn self-will in how I want to do things, and act. It is a challenging, but beautiful and sanctifying process for sure.*
- *Leaving behind my own baggage: wants, needs, opinions, patterns, and preferences. But it is when we are weak that he is strong.*
- *Leaving my past life and all its comforts and pleasures behind, and truly following Christ.*
- *Maintaining a consistent attitude of surrender to God in all of the aspects of the life, as opposed to performing the logistics of the life without truly living it.*
- *Myself, overcoming my flaws and tenderness, my will, choosing the cross and to die to myself in order to choose a greater and more worthy choice. To love to the extreme and to be perfect and holy as He is perfect and holy.*
- *The commitment to celibacy and the nurturing of human intimacy as a committedly celibate man.*
- *The greatest challenge is simply and humbly surrendering everything to the Lord, especially my own will, at all times, though this is also one of the most beautiful parts of this life as well.*
- *The largest challenge for me would be interior change and thinking of course, coming from the secular world stand point and ways of thinking.*
- *The most challenging part of living religious life is detachment from the worldly things we were used to and working on our many faults. It seems that in entering you are given a grace to see faults you didn't notice out in the world and working on getting rid of those can be mighty difficult. But, with God's grace anything is possible.*

Adaptation to Religious Life

Respondents found challenges in adapting to the new life style in their religious communities. This adjustment includes daily schedule, new life pace, food, prayer life, community life, among other things. Some of their responses include:

- *So far, two or three things come to mind: living according to a set schedule and having a constant focus on spiritual life. The third is the sensation I get when walking in the*

streets watching other people: of being in the world, but not living according to it or at the same pace; almost like looking in from the outside.

- *For me, I think the most challenging aspect is the busy and demanding schedule, especially not having as much free time as I was used to. It's also challenging to transition from living in such a technologically saturated and instant communication sort of culture to having very little access to technology and more limited communication with family and friends outside the community.*
- *Living in community with older sisters, missing Mexican food. Keeping up with the schedule of the daily events. Canonical year is difficult.*
- *Adjusting to having to conform to “old” ways on my part and the sisters not open to “adjustments, improvements and new ways.”*
- *I came into religious life in my 50s, well established in a different way of life. I realize how long it takes to let go of the old and take on the new. The self-discipline and faithfulness in 365 daily Lectio Divina, private prayer and meditation. Learning love by living in community: how God uses sisters to rub off rough edges and polish character. Balancing ministry/work with prayer and study balancing community and solitude.*
- *The most challenging aspect of religious life, for me, is always being under the authority of a superior or director. I am a very independent person, and naturally inclined to just do. It is a constant awareness I must keep that I need permission, first before I do something. It is really that surrendering of self will and increase in humility which I have to work on the hardest.*
- *Adapting to religious life has been challenging but there has not been anything I have been asked to do that I could not see the benefit of in the long term.*
- *I find transition into new environments to be a challenge. However “Pain makes you grow” and I desire to grow in the healing Christ.*
- *I have typically been the manager/boss in my civilian jobs, and so the adjustment to everyone being my “senior” in authority is quite an adjustment, as is the lack of a “weekend break,” that time of freedom away from the routine schedule which weekends provided in a Monday-Friday civilian job.*
- *Lack of substantial spiritual life as a community. Lackluster liturgies/divine office that often does not follow rubrics. Very little “real” conversations; a lot of superficial or humorous conversation, but rarely spirituality or prayer life discussed. Too much leniency regarding free time (e.g. allowed to travel whenever we want, no real enforcement of chores).*
- *One of the greatest challenges that I experience during my religious life is that of structuring my life around a new way of life. Going from being just me and on my own to*

now being a part of a community, being part of something that has caused me to step back and look at the way I go about in my life.

- *The constant changing of locations and ministries, as well as changing communities. Never really settling down with the same person/people or in the same place.*
- *With being in only the very early stages of formation, I am finding challenges in the transition of lifestyle.*

Decreasing Communication with Family and Friends

Another emerging challenge that respondents shared was their decreased connection with their family members and friends. The schedule and lifestyle in religious life lead religious to reduce their connections with families and friends. They live far away from their family and friends that sometimes leads them to homesickness. Some of them also felt that their family and friends did not understand religious life and their decision to enter the religious life. They also missed some other relationships and felt that religious life somehow reduces their opportunity for communication. Some of their responses include:

- *At the moment I find the separation hard; I'm not easily able to speak to my friends and family back home and that loss of support can be difficult.*
- *Being far from family/having minimal communication with them, although I understand this sacrifice is beautiful and honors God greatly.*
- *Being farther away from home than I would have originally wanted. Breaking with my girlfriend of five years to pursue this vocation was very difficult. Family and friends not understand my vocation is difficult.*
- *Explaining it to my family. Feeling isolated from friends.*
- *I think I would say the most challenging thing has been the separation from my family.*
- *In my religious life experience right now, the most challenging thing for me is to detach from family and friends.*
- *Letting go of the safe and familiar to embrace a lifestyle that not many people (particularly in my circles) are familiar with. It can be really challenging to explain how it feels to be called, especially when a lot of folks have a less than positive view of the Catholic Church. Religious life also has its own language, and becoming acquainted with it can sometimes be a struggle. There are many processes in these initial phases and at times it can feel overwhelming.*
- *Many things can be challenging. One challenging for me is joining religious life at a time when friends and community members in my home in America think it is something*

crazy or taboo, and having to experience the questions, comments, and reactions from them.

- *Not getting as many opportunities as I would like to see my family, though my order is great about having home visit 2 times per year and with major family events (ex, deaths, severe sickness, and weddings of immediate family).*
- *Separation from family – not able to physically help family members or to attend weddings. Not able to physically help family members or to attend weddings/funerals, except funerals of next of kin.*
- *Separation from family and friends. Knowing that my family is hurting from the separation. Not structuring your own day. Realizing that being is more important than doing.*
- *Separation from friends and family, restriction on some old activities and freedoms.*
- *The change it brings in terms of one's relationship to family has been difficult at times, even though I am blessed with a family that is by and large supportive.*
- *The thing I find most challenging, although it has not been too hard, would have to be contact with family and friends being limited. Although I do see the importance and reasoning behind it, and I am grateful for it, it can be a challenge.*

Other Challenges

In addition, respondents described some challenges in their formation program, in discerning if they chose the right vocation, or in seeking the balance between prayer and ministry life. Some of their comments include:

- *Discerning if it is a true call from the Lord, if it's truly this call.*
- *I find living a spiritual life amidst apostolic ministry is quite challenging because it is important to have a balance between work and prayer.*
- *I find seeking a balance between work, prayer and leisure to be more challenging than I thought it would be. I also find it challenging at times to work with, pray, eat, sleep and play always with the same group of women. I also find it challenging to be alone in the formation process at times but hope for more women to join.*
- *One of my biggest challenges has been trying to figure out what type of ministry I want to pursue that will use my gifts and contribute to the mission of the community.*
- *So far in my beginning stage of formation the most challenging aspects have been transitioning from what I used to in the world to this new life. For instance, getting used to having very limited Internet access as a postulant novice, or going to the store to get*

something I need. Also getting used to not "freely" (for lack of better term) conversing with people/those in your community. But really the difficulty is more so in the transition, because I can see how in these things, you are able to foster a greater relationship with Jesus and your community.

- *The most challenging aspect of religious life is striking the appropriate balance between time in ministry, community and personal prayer and leisure.*
- *The most challenging thing about religious life thus far, has been giving up and surrendering my will to the Lord's and the realization that my time is not my own. It has also been difficult to stay awake and remain joyful at all times after waking up at 4:45 am. It has been a challenge sometimes too, to balance my work and prayer time and knowing how to best use my time that I have free.*