

January 2022

***Women and Men
Professing Perpetual Vows
in Religious Life:
The Profession Class of 2021***

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

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in Religious Life: The Profession Class of 2021***

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



January 2022

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Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a national survey of women and men religious who professed perpetual vows in 2021 in a religious institute, province, or monastery based in the United States. To obtain the names and contact information for these women and men, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) contacted all major superiors of men and women religious institutes that belong to either Conference of Major Superiors of Men or two leadership conferences of women- Leadership Conference of Women Religious and Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious as well as the major superiors of some 100 contemplative communities of women in the United States that were identified by the USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. Each major superior was asked to provide contact information for every member of the institute who was scheduled to profess perpetual vows in 2021. CARA then contacted these men and women religious by e-mail or mail to explain the project and ask them to complete a brief survey.

After repeated follow-ups, CARA received a response from 547 of 742 major superiors, for an overall response rate of 74% among religious institutes. Three religious institutes were not interested in participating in the studies. In all, the major superiors provided contact information for 182 members (84 women and 98 men) who professed perpetual vows in religious life in 2021.

Of these 182 identified women and men religious, a total of 62 sisters and nuns and 60 brothers and priests responded to the survey by January 10, 2021. These 60 men include brothers, priests, and those pursuing studies leading to priestly ordination. This represents a response rate of 67% of the 182 potential members of the Profession Class of 2021 that were reported to CARA by major superiors of men and women religious.

Major Findings

Demographic Background

- Eight in ten responding religious institutes (82%) had no one professing perpetual vows in religious life in 2021. One in ten institutes (11%) had one perpetual profession and about one in sixteen (7%) reported two or more. In total, the religious institutes report 182 newly perpetually professed members (84 women and 98 men) in 2021.
- The average age of responding religious of the Profession Class of 2021 is 37. Half of the responding religious are age 34 or younger. The youngest is 24 and the oldest is 70.
- Three-fourths of the responding religious (76%) were born in the United States. Of those born outside the United States, the most common countries of origin are the Philippines and Vietnam (5 religious from each).
- On average, the respondents who were born outside the United States were 23 years old when they first came to the United States and lived here for 15 years before perpetual profession.
- Seven in ten responding religious (71%) report their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian, European American, or white. More than one in ten (13%) members of the Profession Class of 2021 identifies as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian. One in ten identifies as Hispanic/Latino(a). Four percent identifies as African/African American/black. And just two respondents identify as mixed race.
- More than nine in ten responding religious (93%) have been Catholic since birth. Among those who became Catholic later in life, their average age at the time of their conversion was 26.

Family Background

- Nine in ten respondents (94%) report that when they were children, they had at least one parent who was Catholic. Three quarters (76%) report that both parents were Catholic.
- Almost all (97%) respondents were raised by their biological parents during the most formative part of their childhood. Besides, one in ten (12%) report being raised by their grandparents during the most formative part of their childhood.
- During the most formative part of their childhood, nine in ten (91%) respondents were raised by a married couple, living together. One in twenty respondents were raised by one parent who was either separated or divorced. Three percent was raised by one

parent who was widowed. One percent was raised by an unmarried couple who lived together.

- Almost all responding religious (99%) of the Profession Class of 2021 have at least one sibling. One in five (20%) have one brother or sister. Four in five (42%) report having two or three. A third (35%) have four or more siblings.
- Two in five (40%) respondents are the eldest in their family. About a third (35%) of respondents are somewhere in the middle of their family. A quarter (24%) are the youngest. Just one respondent is the only child in her family.
- More than a third (36%) report having a relative who is a priest or a religious.

Education, Work, and Ministry Experience

- Just over one in ten (15%) responding religious report being home schooled at some time in their educational background. Among those who were home schooled, the average length of time they were home schooled was eight years. Women are more likely than men to be home schooled (13 women compared with 5 men).
- Nearly half of the responding religious (47%) attended a Catholic elementary school, which is higher than that for all Catholic adults in the United States (16%). These respondents are also more likely than other U.S. Catholics to have attended a Catholic high school (43% of responding religious, compared to 8% of U.S. adult Catholics) and much more likely to have attended a Catholic college (36% of responding religious, compared to 5% of U.S. adult Catholics).
- The Profession Class of 2021 is highly educated. Two in ten responding religious earned a graduate degree before entering their religious institute. Seven in ten (70%) entered their religious institute with at least a bachelor's degree (63% for women and 77% for men).
- Most responding religious did not report that educational debt delayed their application for entrance to their institute. Among 6% of respondents who did report educational debt, however, they averaged about 4 years of delay while they paid down an average of \$41,000 in educational debt. Family members and parish are the most common source of assistance for paying down educational debt.
- More than four in five (84%) had work experience prior to entering their religious institute. Three in five (57%) were employed full-time and more than a quarter (27%) were employed part-time before entering their religious institute.

- More than nine in ten responding religious (94%) served in one or more specified ministries before entering their religious institute, either in a paid ministry position or as a volunteer. The most common ministry experience reported by respondents was service as an altar server (48%), followed by faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA (44%), and lector (42%).
- Four in five (80%) participated in one or more religious programs or activities before entering their religious institute. Two-fifths of respondents (39%) participated in youth ministry or youth group. Three-tenth participated in young adult ministry or group (33%) and Catholic campus ministry/Newman Center (30%). One in five (18%) participated in a World Youth Day prior to entering their religious institute.
- Over nine in ten responding religious of the Profession Class of 2021 (93%) participated in one or more of these prayer practices or groups on a regular basis prior to entering their religious institute. Nearly nine in ten (86%) participated in Eucharistic Adoration. Seven in ten respondents (70%) did rosary or had retreat (65%). Six in ten (58%) had spiritual direction before entering their religious institute.

Consideration of Religious Life and Choice of Community

- On average, respondents report that they were 19 years old when they first considered a vocation to religious life, with half being 18 or younger when they first did so.
- Nearly nine in ten (86%) responding religious report that someone encouraged them to consider a vocation to religious life. Men are more likely than women to be encouraged by a parish priest, friend, mother, and parishioner.
- Almost three-fifths (56%) report that they were discouraged from considering a vocation to religious life by one or more persons. Women are more likely than men to report being discouraged from discerning a religious vocation (66% compared with 47% of men religious).
- On average, respondents report having known the members of their religious institute for three years before they entered. Three-tenths (30%) report being first acquainted with their institute through print or online promotional material published by the institute. A quarter (23%) were first acquainted in/through a sponsored institution or work of the institute (e.g., school, hospital). Men are more likely than women to be acquainted with their religious institute through this means (32% compared to 15% of women religious).
- Most (95%) had participated in at least one of these programs or experiences prior to entering their religious institute. Among the vocation programs and experiences about

which they were asked, respondents are most likely to have participated in a “Come and See” experience. Seven in ten (71%) report participating in this program before they entered their religious institute. Men are more likely than women to participate in this experience.

Introduction

Since 2010, the Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University to conduct a survey of women and men religious who profess perpetual vows each year in a religious congregation, province, or monastery based in the United States. For this project, CARA was asked to gather information about the characteristics and experiences of these religious and report the findings to the Secretariat for use with the World Day of Consecrated Life in February. CARA then programmed the questionnaires into an online survey to give respondents the option of completing the survey either online or on paper. This report presents results of this survey of women and men religious of the Profession Class of 2021.

To obtain the names and contact information for these women and men, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) contacted all major superiors of men and women religious institutes that belong to either Conference of Major Superiors of Men or two leadership conferences of women- Leadership Conference of Women Religious and Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious as well as the major superiors of some 100 contemplative communities of women in the United States that were identified by the USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. Each major superior was asked to provide contact information for every member of the institute who was scheduled to profess perpetual vows in 2021. CARA then contacted these men and women religious by e-mail or mail to explain the project and ask them to complete a brief survey.

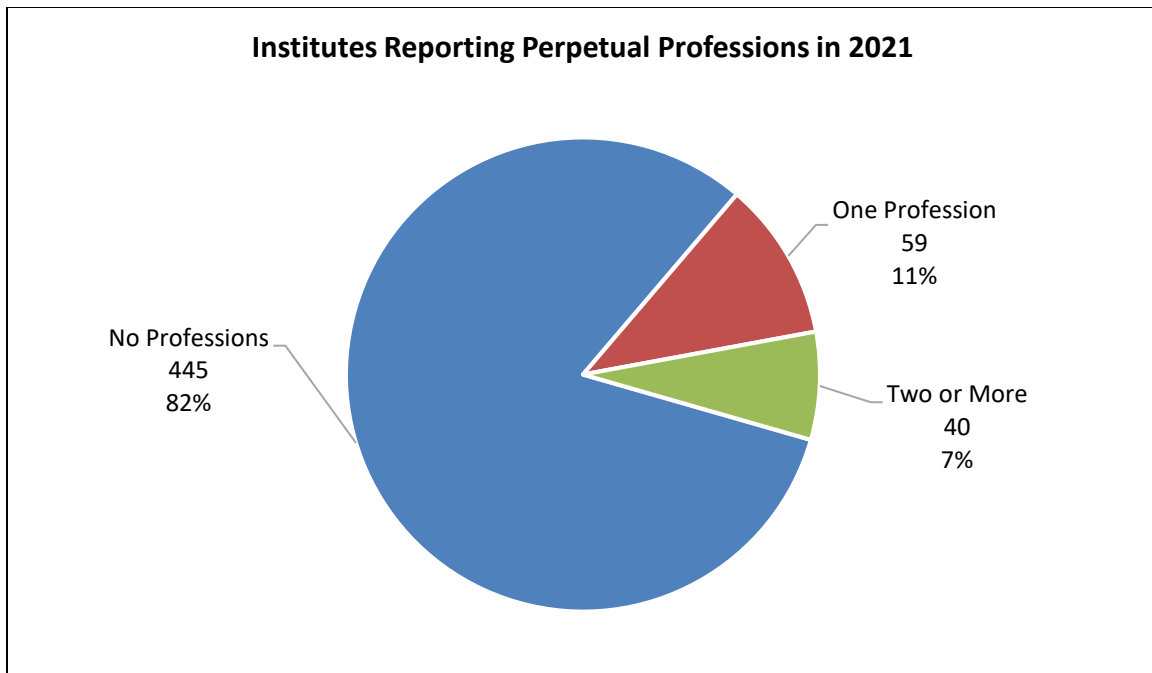
After repeated follow-ups, CARA received a response from 547 of 742 major superiors, for an overall response rate of 74% among religious institutes. Three religious institutes were not interested in participating in the studies. In all, the major superiors provided contact information for 182 members (84 women and 98 men) who professed perpetual vows in religious life in 2021.

Of these 182 identified women and men religious, a total of 62 sisters and nuns and 60 brothers and priests responded to the survey by January 10, 2021. These 60 men include brothers, priests, and those pursuing studies leading to priestly ordination. This represents a response rate of 67% of the 182 potential members of the Profession Class of 2021 that were reported to CARA by major superiors of men and women religious.

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

Institutes Reporting Perpetual Profession

CARA asked the 742 religious institutes, provinces, or monasteries in the United States to provide the names of members who professed or were planning to profess perpetual vows in 2021. A total of 547 major superiors responded (a 74% response rate) with 182 names of perpetually professed sisters, priests, and brothers. Three major superiors responded that they would not participate this year.



A total of 445 major superiors (82% of respondents) report that they had no one professing perpetual vows in 2021. One in ten institutes (11%) had one perpetual profession. Another 40 major superiors (7%) report from two to nine members professing perpetual vows in 2021.

The sisters and nuns who responded to the survey represent 37 different religious institutes, provinces, or monasteries of women religious. Similarly, the brothers and priests who responded come from 40 different religious institutes, provinces, or monasteries of men religious.

Age of Professed

The average age of responding religious of the Profession Class of 2021 is 37. Half of the responding religious are age 34 or younger.

Age of Professed Women and Men			
<i>Percentage in each age category</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
29 and younger	26	23	20
Age 30-39	48	52	43
Age 40-49	16	16	15
Age 50-59	7	5	8
Age 60 and older	4	5	3
Average age	37	37	36
Median age	34	34	34
Range in ages	24-70	25-70	24-69

- A quarter of respondents (26%) make final profession at the age of 29 or younger. The two youngest are 24 years of age.
- Half (48%) profess perpetual vows at age 30 to 39. One in six (16%) make perpetual profession at age 40-49. And one in sixteen (7%) do so at age 50-59.
- Less than one in twenty respondents profess perpetual vows at age 60 or older. The oldest sister makes final profession at the age of 70.

Country of Birth and Age at Entry to the United States

Three in four responding religious (76%) were born in the United States.

Continent of Birth			
<i>Percentage in each category</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
North America	78	84	72
USA	76	81	72
Canada	2	3	0
Asia	10	8	12
Latin America	4	2	7
Europe	4	3	5
Africa	2	0	5
Oceania	2	3	0

One in four (24%) were born outside the United States. These respondents identified a total of 18 different countries of origin. Vietnam and the Philippines (5 religious from each) are the most frequently mentioned country of birth among responding religious who were born outside the United States.

Responding religious who were born outside the United States have lived in the United States for an average of 15 years. Half first came to live in the United States in 2007 or earlier.

Entrance to the United States				
	<u>Year</u>	<u>Age at Entry</u>		
	Both	Both	Women	Men
Mean	2006	23	23	23
Median	2007	24	21	24
Range	1987-2019	2-46	2-46	2-40

On average, responding foreign-born religious came to live in the United States at age 23. Half were age 24 or younger when they came to live in the United States. The youngest came to the United States at the age of two; the oldest entered the United States at the age of 46.

Race and Ethnic Background

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

Race and Ethnic Background			
<i>Percentage in each category</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Caucasian/European American/white	71	77	65
Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	13	13	13
Hispanic/Latino(a)	10	5	15
African/African American/black	4	2	7
Mixed race	2	3	0

More than one in ten (13%) members of the Profession Class of 2021 identifies as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian. One in ten identifies as Hispanic/Latino(a). Four percent identifies as African/African American/black. And just two respondents identify as mixed race.

Differences by Country of Birth

Among those who were born in the United States, nearly nine in ten responding religious (86%) identify themselves as Caucasian/European American/white, followed by Hispanic or Latino(a) (8%). Among those who were born outside the United States, half (48%) identify as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, 24% as Caucasian/European American/white, 14% as African/African American/black, and another 14% as Hispanic/Latino(a).

Religious Background

More than nine in ten responding religious (93%) have been Catholic since birth. Among those who became Catholic later in life, their average age at the time of their conversion was 26.

Catholic Background			
<i>Percentage responding</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Catholic since birth	93	95	90
Became Catholic later in life	7	5	10
Average age at entering the Church	26	25	26

Those who came into full communion with the Catholic Church from another denomination or those who converted from another faith tradition came from a variety of faiths: Protestant, Pentecostal, Non-practicing Lutheran, Mormon/Presbyterian/Unaffiliated/Eastern Religions, Lutheran, and Buddhist.

Family Background

Nine in ten respondents (94%) report that when they were children, they had at least one parent who was Catholic. Three quarters (76%) report that both parents were Catholic.

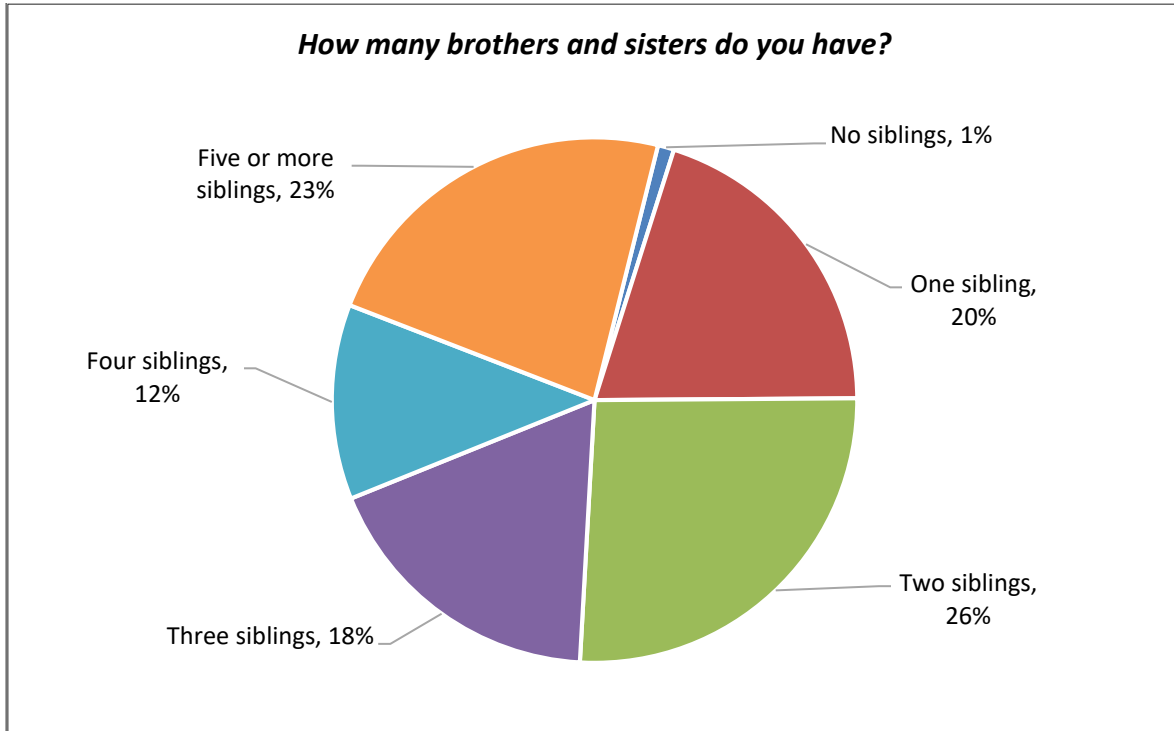
<i>What was the religious background of your parents when you were a child?</i>			
Percentage responding			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Both parents Catholic	76	74	78
Neither parent was Catholic	6	2	10
Mother Catholic, father not	14	19	8
Father Catholic, mother not	4	5	3

Almost all (97%) respondents were raised by their biological parents during the most formative part of their childhood. Besides, one in ten (12%) report being raised by their grandparents during the most formative part of their childhood.

During the most formative part of their childhood, nine in ten (91%) respondents were raised by a married couple, living together. One in twenty respondents were raised by one parent who was either separated or divorced. Three percent was raised by one parent who was widowed. One percent was raised by an unmarried couple who lived together.

<i>During the most formative part of your childhood, were you raised by:</i>			
Percentage responding			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Married couple, living together	91	93	90
One parent, separated/divorced	4	5	3
One parent, widowed	3	2	3
Unmarried couple, living together	1	0	2
I prefer not to answer	1	0	2

Almost all responding religious (99%) of the Profession Class of 2021 have at least one sibling. One in five (20%) have one brother or sister. Four in five (42%) report having two or three. A third (35%) have four or more siblings.



Two in five (40%) respondents are the eldest in their family. About a third (35%) of respondents are somewhere in the middle of their family. A quarter (24%) are the youngest. Just one respondent is the only child in her family.

What is your birth order?
Percentage in each category

	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Eldest	40	40	40
Somewhere in the middle	35	31	40
Youngest	24	27	20
Only child	1	2	0

More than a third (36%) report having a relative who is a priest or a religious.

Education

Nearly half (47%) attended a Catholic elementary or middle school. More than two-fifths (43%) attended a Catholic high school. Just over a third (36%) attended a Catholic college before entering their religious institute.

Attendance at Catholic School*			
<i>Percentage responding</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Parish-based religious education/ CCD/RCIA	53	52	53
Catholic elementary or middle school	47	50	43
Catholic high school	43	47	40
Catholic college or university	36	36	37
Catholic ministry formation program	20	18	20
*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one category.			

Members of the Profession Class of 2021 are more likely than other U.S. adult Catholics to have attended a Catholic elementary school. In a 2016 national poll conducted by CARA,¹ 16% of U.S. adult Catholics report having attended a Catholic elementary school compared to 47% of the members of the Profession Class of 2021. Responding perpetually professed religious of 2021 are also more likely than other U.S. adult Catholics to have attended a Catholic high school (43% among responding religious, compared to 8% of U.S. adult Catholics) and much more likely to have attended a Catholic college (36% of responding religious, compared to 5% of U.S. adult Catholics).

In addition, two in ten (20%) responding women and men religious report that they participated in a Catholic ministry formation program before they entered their religious institute.

Whether or not they ever attended a Catholic elementary or high school, half of the respondents (53%) participated in a religious education program/CCD/RCIA in their parish. Among respondents who said they participated in a religious education program in their parish,

¹CARA Catholic Poll, 2016. Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

73% did *not* report attending a Catholic elementary school and 77% did *not* attend a Catholic high school.

Just over one in ten (15%) responding religious report being home schooled at some time in their educational background. Among those who were home schooled, the average length of time they were home schooled was eight years. Women are more likely than men to be home schooled (13 women compared with 5 men).

Were you ever home schooled?			
Percentage responding			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Yes	15	21	8
Average length of time being home schooled	8	7	9

The responding religious are highly educated. Seven in ten (70%) earned an undergraduate or graduate degree before entering their religious institute.

Highest Education Completed Before Entering			
Percentage responding			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Elementary school (K-8)	1	2	0
High school	9	13	5
Trade or technical school	1	0	2
Some college, no degree	20	23	17
Undergraduate degree	48	45	50
Graduate degree	22	18	27

Just one in ten (11%) religious of the Profession Class of 2021 completed only high school or less before entering the religious institute. Half (48%) had an undergraduate degree and one in five (22%) had a graduate degree before entering their religious institute. Responding sisters or nuns and brothers or priests are equally likely to have an undergraduate

degree; however, men are slightly more likely to receive a graduate degree before entering their religious institute (27% compared to 18%).

Educational Debt

One in twenty responding religious (6%) report that educational debt delayed their application for entrance to the religious institute. While five sisters report having educational debt, only two men religious report so.

Impact of Educational Debt on Entrance to Religious Life			
	Both	Women	Men
Application delayed by debt	6%	8%	3%
Average length of delay	4 years	4 years	4.5 years
Average amount of debt	\$41,000	\$27,600	\$75,000
Median amount of debt	\$20,000	\$18,000	\$75,000

Among 12 responding religious who were delayed by educational debt, the average length of time required to pay off their educational debt was around four years. The average amount of educational debt they carried was \$41,000.

Four responding religious who reported that educational debt delayed their application for entrance to a religious institute report receiving assistance from family members (3 members), from parish (2 members), and from Mater Ecclesiae Fund for Vocations (1 member) in paying down their debt.

Work Experience

More than four in five (84%) of responding religious report some type of work experience prior to entering the religious institute. Three in five (57%) were employed full-time and more than a quarter (27%) were employed part-time before entering their religious institute.

Prior Work Experience			
<i>Percentage in each category</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Business/Occupational	51	51	51
Education/Academic	30	28	33
Health care	9	13	4
Church/pastoral ministry	7	4	10
Others	3	4	2

Half of responding religious (51%) report that they were in some form of business, or an occupation or trade, or technology prior to entering their religious institute. Three-tenths had been employed in education (30%). One-tenths had been employed in the health care. Women are more likely than men religious to work in health care (14% compared with 4% of men religious).

Participation in Religious Programs, Activities, or Ministries

Many responding religious were active in ministry before entering their religious institute. More than nine in ten responding religious (94%) served in one or more specified ministries before entering their religious institute, either in a paid ministry position or as a volunteer. The most common ministry experience reported by respondents was service as an altar server, with half serving as an altar server (48%).

Ministry Experience*			
<i>Percentage checking each response</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Altar server	48	24	72
Faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA	44	52	27
Lector	42	29	55
Youth ministry/campus ministry	39	39	38
Music ministry, cantor, or choir	36	45	27
Extraordinary Minister of Communion	32	23	42
Social service ministry (e.g., Catholic Charities program, other community service)	22	21	23
Teacher in a Catholic school	18	13	23
Hospital or prison ministry	4	2	7

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

- More than four in ten (44%) served in faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA.
- Four in ten served in each of the following ministries:
 - Lector (42%)
 - Youth ministry/campus ministry (39%)
 - Music ministry, cantor, or choir (36%)
- Three in ten (32%) served Extraordinary Minister of Communion.
- Two in ten served social service ministry (e.g., Catholic Charities program, other community service) (22%) and taught in a Catholic school (18%).
- Just one in twenty served in hospital or prison ministry (4%) before they entered their religious institute.

Four in five (80%) participated in one or more religious programs or activities before entering their religious institute.

Participation in Religious Programs or Activities*			
<i>Percentage checking each response</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Youth ministry or youth group	39	50	27
Young adult ministry or group	33	37	28
Catholic campus ministry/Newman Center	30	37	23
World Youth Day	18	26	10
Franciscan University of Steubenville High School Youth Conference	11	19	2
Fellowship of Catholic University Students	10	15	5
Religious institute volunteer	7	7	7
National Catholic Youth Conference	7	10	5
St. Vincent de Paul Society	5	3	7
National Evangelization Team	3	5	0
Catholic Scouting	—	**	7
Catholic Daughters	—	2	***
Knights of Columbus	—	**	28
Sodality	—	5	***

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

- Two-fifths of respondents (39%) participated in youth ministry or youth group.
- Three-tenth participated in young adult ministry or group (33%) and Catholic campus ministry/Newman Center (30%) before entering religious life.
- One in five (18%) participated in a World Youth Day prior to entering their religious institute.
- One in ten participated in a Franciscan University of Steubenville High School Youth Conference (11%) and Fellowship of Catholic University Students (10%).

- About one in sixteen participated in a religious institute volunteer (7%) and National Catholic Youth Conference (7%).
- Around one in eighteen participated in other activities St. Vincent de Paul Society (5%) and National Evangelization Team (3%).

Private Prayer Practices and Prayer Groups

Private prayer and prayer groups are another type of formative experience that can help shape one’s religious faith and openness to consider a vocation. Just over nine in ten responding religious of the Profession Class of 2021 (93%) participated in one or more of these prayer practices or groups on a regular basis prior to entering their religious institute.

<i>Did you participate in any of these prayer practices or groups on a regular basis before entering your religious institute?</i>			
Percentage responding			
	All	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Eucharistic Adoration	86	84	68
Rosary	70	69	70
Retreats	65	74	55
Spiritual Direction	58	60	57
Faith-sharing group/Bible study	47	47	47
Lectio Divina	35	34	37

- Eucharistic Adoration is the most common type of formative prayer experience, reported by nearly nine in ten religious of the Profession Class of 2021 (86%). Women are more likely than men to report doing Eucharistic adoration before entering religious life (84% compared to 68% of men).
- Seven in ten respondents (70%) did rosary or had retreat (65%).
- Six in ten (58%) had spiritual direction before entering their religious institute.
- Half (47%) regularly participated in a faith-sharing group or a Bible study group.
- Just over a third (35%) regularly participated in *Lectio Divina* prayer prior to entering their religious institute. This is an ancient prayer practice from the Order of St. Benedict.

Consideration of a Vocation to Religious Life

On average, responding religious report being 19 years old when they first considered a vocation to religious life, with half being 18 or younger when they first considered a vocation.

Age When First Considered a Vocation to Religious Life			
	Age		
	Both	Women	Men
Mean	19	18	20
Median	18	17	19
Range	3-64	3-64	3-54

Encouragement to Consider a Vocation

Nearly nine in ten (86%) responding religious report that someone encouraged them to consider a vocation to religious life.

Encouragement to Consider a Vocation to Religious Life*			
<i>Percentage checking each response</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Religious sister or brother	49	53	45
Parish priest	45	37	53
Friend	42	37	47
Mother	23	18	28
Parishioner	20	11	28
Teacher/Catechist	19	18	20
Youth minister	18	19	17
Other relative	16	11	22
Father	16	13	18
Campus minister/School chaplain	16	15	18
Deacon	5	2	8
Bishop	4	3	5

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

- Half report being encouraged by a religious sister or brother (49%) or a parish priest (45%) to consider a vocation to religious life.
- Two in five respondents (42%) say that a friend encouraged them to consider a vocation to religious life.
- One in five report being encouraged to consider a vocation to religious life by their mother (23%), parishioner (20%), teacher/catechist (19%), or a youth minister (18%).
- One in sixteen (16%) report being encouraged to consider a vocation to religious life by other relatives, their father, or a campus minister/school chaplain.
- Respondents are more likely to report that they received encouragement from their family members than from a bishop, deacon, or youth minister.
- Men are more likely than women to be encouraged by a parish priest (53% compared to 37% of women religious), friend (47% compared to 37% of women), mother (28% compared to 18% of women), and parishioner (28% compared to 11% of women).

Discouragement from Considering a Vocation

Almost three-fifths (56%) report that they were discouraged from considering a vocation to religious life by one or more persons. Women are more likely than men to report being discouraged from discerning a religious vocation (66% compared with 47% of men religious).

Discouragement from Considering a Vocation to Religious Life*			
<i>Percentage checking each response</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Friend or school classmate	52	55	46
Other relative	50	53	43
Mother	37	43	29
Father	29	28	32
Colleague or coworker	19	18	21
Priest or other clergy	10	8	14
Teacher	9	8	11
Religious sister or brother	6	10	2
Someone else	2	0	2
Youth minister	1	2	0

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

- Those who reported being *discouraged* from considering a vocation are most likely to report that they were discouraged by a friend or school classmate (52%), another relative (50%), or mother (37%). Women are more likely than men to have been discouraged by their other relative (53% compared to 43% of men).
- Very few respondents say they were discouraged from considering a vocation by teachers, religious sisters or brothers, or youth ministers.

Initial Acquaintance with the Religious Institute

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

<i>How many years did you know the members of your religious institute before entering?</i>			
	Years		
	Both	Women	Men
Mean	3	3	4
Median	2	3	2
Range	0-28	0-18	0-28

A quarter of respondents (25%) report that they knew the members of their religious institute for one year; three in ten (28%) knew the members of their religious institute for two years before they entered their institute.

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

<i>How did you first become acquainted with your religious institute?*</i>			
Percentage checking each response			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Through print or online promotional material published by the institute	30	34	27
In/through a sponsored institution or work of the institute (e.g., school, hospital)	23	15	32
Through a friend or relative in the institute	18	21	15
Through the recommendation of a priest or advisor	17	15	20
Through working with a Sister/Brother from the institute	9	3	15
At a vocation event (e.g., Vocation Fair)	7	8	5
Through a vocation matching or placement service	6	7	5
Other	33	34	32

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

- Three-tenths (30%) report being first acquainted with their institute through print or online promotional material published by the institute.
- A quarter (23%) were first acquainted in/through a sponsored institution or work of the institute (e.g., school, hospital). Men are more likely than women to be acquainted with their religious institute through this means (32% compared to 15% of women religious).
- One in five indicate that they first became acquainted with their institute through a friend or relative in the institute (18%) and through the recommendation of a priest or advisor (17%).
- About one in ten indicate that they are acquainted with their religious institute through a working with a sister/brother from the institute (9%), at a vocation event (e.g., Vocation Fair) (7%), or through a vocation matching or placement service (6%).
- One in ten (30%) said they first became acquainted with their religious institute through some other means. Some of those “other” responses included:
 - A campus pro-life conference.
 - A friend took me to a Capuchin vocation retreat.
 - At a diocesan event for young adult Catholics, and seeing the sisters at Theology on Tap
 - Attend the grade school they ran.
 - Attended a retreat held at the sisters' retreat house, though not sponsored by the sisters.
 - Attended their Mass.
 - Attending the same university as the sister students.
 - Class trip to the monastery.
 - Conversation with my mother who went to Ohio Dominican. Then, after viewing the Province website, I reached out to the Vocations Director and went on a Come & See Retreat.
 - Event held on campus.
 - God’s providence.
 - I just met the sisters in the street.
 - Learned about them in a class and looked online.
 - Learning Church history and about the role of the Dominicans in the life of the Church.
 - My brother in the seminary with the Norbertines.
 - My chaplain at campus was a Maryknoll priest.
 - My parents were Lay Members of SOLT.
 - My sister told me.
 - Online inquiry/research.
 - Parishioner with a relative in the Institute.
 - Personal search online.

- Priests said mass at parish.
- Promotion material.
- Religious Discernment Group hosted by Vocation Directors.
- Reputation/Saints.
- Retreat.
- Sister came to speak at my high school.
- Sisters invited me to visit and attend various retreats.
- Studying in their seminary.
- The chaplain at my Boy Scout camp.
- The vocation director was a part-time chaplain at my undergrad alma mater.
- They were studying on my college campus.
- Through a friend.
- Through a religious brother who spent his summer ministry here.
- Through a visit to the monastery.
- Through our youth group.
- Visit to parishes run by the institute.
- Went to Notre Dame... didn't really get to know Holy Cross... but the Holy Cross vocation director helped me discern with other communities... and eventually I figured out that Holy Cross was a good fit.
- Working with Sisters on a mission trip.
- World Youth Day.

Vocation/Discernment Programs and Experiences

Most (95%) had participated in at least one of these programs or experiences prior to entering their religious institute. Among the vocation programs and experiences about which they were asked, respondents are most likely to have participated in a “Come and See” experience. Seven in ten (71%) report participating in this program before they entered their religious institute. Men are more likely than women to participate in this experience.

Vocation/Discernment Programs and Experiences*			
<i>Percentage checking each response</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
“Come and See” experience	71	65	77
Vocation retreat	51	58	43
Live-in experience	23	19	27
“Andrew Dinner”	—	**	3
“Nun Run”	—	18	***
Other	10	16	3

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

- Half of responding religious (51%) participated in a vocation retreat before entering their religious institute.
- Nearly a quarter (23%) participated in some sort of live-in experience with their religious institute before entering.
- One in five report participating in a “Nun Run” (asked only of women), and just 3% of men had participated in an “Andrew Dinner” (asked only of men).

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

- "Come and Pray" experience.
- 1 day Lenten Retreat to see who these sisters were.
- College Campus Ministry Women Discernment Group.
- I lived near the Sisters and worked in their schools.
- I made a personal visit.
- Informal stays with the sisters, under direction of the Vocation Directress.
- Personal visit.
- Retreat for those not discerning.
- Various events offered.
- Women's Parish Retreat.

Appendix: Questionnaire with Response Frequencies



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



Profession Class of 2021 National Survey

This survey will help us to understand the characteristics of the women professing perpetual vows in religious life in 2021. In addition, some of the information will be used by the Secretariat in conjunction with the World Day of Consecrated Life to assist the media in offering positive and accurate information about the women who profess perpetual vows each year. The information you provide here will be combined with that of other religious women who have made or are making their profession of perpetual vows this year for use in press releases and highlighted on the USCCB website. **Your participation in this project is very important. No individual level information will be released without your express permission. Please respond by December 15.**

1. Name of your religious institute:

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

3. Your year of birth: _____

4. Are you: 49 Male 51 Female

5. Were you born in the United States? 76 Yes 24 No

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

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

71 Caucasian/European American/white

4 African/African American/black

10 Hispanic/Latina

13 Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian/Middle Eastern

0 Native American/Alaska Native

2 Mixed race

0 Other: _____

7. How long have you been a Catholic?

93 Baptized Catholic as an infant ("cradle Catholic")

7 Became a Catholic later in life

7a. If you answered "Became a Catholic later in life" in the previous question, how old were you when you became a Catholic? _____

7b. What was your previous religious affiliation? _____

8. Who raised you during the most formative part of your childhood? **Please select all that apply.**

- 97 Biological parent(s)
- 1 Step parent
- 1 Adoptive parent(s)
- 13 Grandparent(s)
- 5 Other relative(s)
- 1 Someone else
- 0 I prefer not to answer

8a. [If selected biological/step/adoptive parent(s)] During the most formative part of your childhood, were you raised by: (Please select one)

- 91 Married couple, living together
- 0 Married couple, living separately
- 0 Unmarried couple, living separately
- 1 Unmarried couple, living together
- 3 One parent, widowed
- 4 One parent, separated/divorced
- 0 One parent, single/unmarried
- 0 Something else
- 1 I prefer not to answer

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

- 76 Both parents Catholic
- 14 Mother Catholic, father non-Catholic
- 6 Neither parent was Catholic
- 4 Father Catholic, mother non-Catholic

10. How many brothers and sisters do you have? _____

11. What is your birth order?

- 1 Only child
- 40 Eldest
- 24 Youngest
- 35 Somewhere in the middle

12. Do (did) you have a relative who is a priest or a religious? 36 Yes 64 No

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

- 53 Parish-based religious education/ CCD/RCIA
- 43 Catholic high school
- 36 Catholic college or university
- 47 Catholic elementary or middle school
- 20 Catholic ministry formation program

14. Were you ever home schooled? 15 Yes 85 No

14a. If "Yes," total number of years of home schooling: _____

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

1 Elementary school (K-8)

20 Some college, but not a Bachelor's degree

9 High school

48 College or university undergraduate degree

1 Trade or technical school

22 Graduate degree

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

6 Yes

94 No

16a. If "Yes," approximately how long were you delayed? _____

16b. If "Yes," what was the amount of your educational debt: \$ _____

16c. If "Yes," did you receive assistance from any of these groups in paying down your debt?

(Please check all that apply)

Family members

Mater Ecclesiae Fund for Vocations

Parish

Serra Fund for Vocations

Religious community

Knights of Columbus Fund for Vocations

Friends/co-workers

National Fund for Catholic Religious Vocations

The Labouré Society

Other: _____

17. Were you employed before entering your religious institute?

16 No

27 Yes, part-time

57 Yes, full-time

17a. *If yes*, what was your main work experience prior to entering your religious institute?

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

16 No

64 Yes, as a volunteer

9 Yes, part-time

12 Yes, full-time

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

48 Altar server

18 Teacher in a Catholic school

32 Extraordinary Minister of Communion

4 Hospital or prison ministry

42 Lector

22 Social service ministry (e.g., Catholic Charities program, other community (service)

36 Music ministry, cantor, choir

44 Faith formation, catechetical ministry,

39 Youth minister or Campus minister

RCIA

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

3 Catholic Scouting (if male)

1 Catholic Daughters (if female)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 30 Catholic campus ministry/Newman Center | 3 National Evangelization Team (NET) |
| 10 Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) | 7 Religious institute volunteer (e.g., Mercy Volunteer Corps or Jesuit Volunteer Corps) |
| 11 Franciscan University of Steubenville High School Youth Conference | 5 St. Vincent de Paul Society |
| 14 Knights of Columbus (if male) | 18 World Youth Day |
| 3 Sodality (if female) | 33 Young adult ministry or group |
| 7 National Catholic Youth Conference | 43 Youth ministry or youth group |

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

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 76 Eucharistic Adoration | 47 Faith-sharing group/Bible study |
| 70 Rosary | 65 Retreats |
| 35 Lectio Divina | 58 Spiritual direction |

22. How old were you when you first considered a vocation to religious life? _____

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

- | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 23 Mother | 19 Teacher/Catechist | 45 Parish Priest |
| 16 Father | 18 Youth Minister | 49 Religious sister or brother |
| 16 Other relative | 16 Campus Minister /School Chaplain | 5 Deacon |
| 42 Friend | 4 Bishop | |
| 20 Parishioner | | |

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

- 56 Yes 44 No

24a. If "Yes" who discouraged you (Please check all that apply):

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 37 Mother | 52 Friend or school classmate |
| 29 Father | 9 Teacher |
| 50 Other relative | 2 Youth minister |
| 10 Priest or other clergy | 19 Colleague or coworker |
| 10 Religious sister or brother | |
| 2 Someone else: _____ | |

25. How many years did you know the members of your religious institute before you entered? _____

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

- 23 In/through a sponsored institution or work of the institute (e.g., school, hospital)
- 9 Through working with a Sister from the institute
- 18 Through a friend or relative in the institute
- 17 Through the recommendation of a priest or advisor
- 30 Through print or online promotional material published by the institute
- 6 Through a vocation matching or placement service
- 7 At a vocation event (e.g., Vocation Fair)
- 33 Other: _____

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

- 2 "Andrew Dinner" (if male)
- 9 "Nun Run" (if female)
- 71 "Come and See" experience
- 10 Other: _____
- 51 Vocation retreat
- 23 Live-in experience

28. Every religious has his/her own interesting story. Please briefly complete the following statement about yourself. This is to be **up to three sentences** that can be shared on the USCCB Profession Class of 2021 webpage. Please do not include overly personal information.

People might be surprised to know that I _____

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

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____
 Phone Number: _____ E-mail: _____

30. I permit the USCCB to use my name, statement, and photograph on the Profession Class of 2021 webpage.

Yes No I permit the USCCB to use my name, statement, and photograph on the Profession Class of 2021 webpage.

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

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

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

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