



Special Report

Placing social science research at the service of the Church in the United States since 1964

Fall 2015

Population Trends among Religious Institutes of Men

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In spring 2014, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) initiated a longitudinal study of institutes of women and men religious in the United States, drawing on data reported by these institutes to *The Official Catholic Directory (OCD)*. The first publication in this series, *Population Trends among Religious Institutes of Women*, was released by CARA in fall 2014. This second report in the series, *Population Trends among Religious Institutes of Men*, draws from the same source, incorporating data from 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2015. When an institute did not list a total for a given year, or if the number listed seemed irregular, the records from previous and following years were consulted. Although the OCD lists religious institute numbers according to province, CARA researchers combined those separate listings into one total number for each institute.

The OCD presents the numbers for each religious institute as they were reported by the institutes. For example, one institute may report their novices as novices, while another may report their novices as seminarians or students. For accuracy, the total number that CARA compiled for each institute includes all priests, brothers, novices, seminarians, and any other vowed member reported by the institute. Any pre-novices and lay associates were excluded from this total. For this reason, the total numbers of men religious reported here do not align with the total numbers of religious priests and brothers reported in the General Summary in the OCD; nor do they align with the total numbers of religious priests and brothers reported by CARA on its website. Those numbers include only the men religious who have professed perpetual vows and do not include the men in formation who have professed first vows.

In 1970, the number of priests, brothers, and men in formation in religious institutes outnumbered diocesan priests by over 2,500.¹ Altogether, the Catholic Church in the United States was bustling with the vitality of nearly 80,000 men in ministry as priests (diocesan or religious) or brothers. By the late 1970s, the two populations (diocesan and religious) intersected and diocesan priests have outnumbered religious priests and brothers since that time. The most current data indicate that today there are over 8,000 more diocesan priests than there are men in religious institutes. CARA undertook this longitudinal study of population trends in men's religious institutes to investigate in more detail some of the trends that underlie this decrease in numbers over the past 45 years.

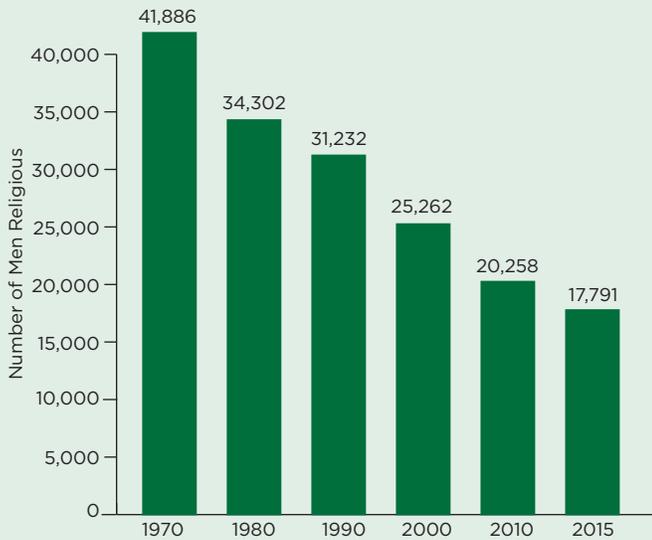
The first section of this report presents overall population trends in the number of men religious as reported by *The Official Catholic Directory*. To look more deeply, CARA created seven categories that are based on observation of the trends among the various institutes within this overall population. The first three categories present the ten largest institutes, the ten institutes surrounding the median (the midpoint of all religious institutes as ranked by size), and the ten smallest institutes according to the number of members listed in the OCD in 1970. A fourth category is new religious institutes that were not listed in 1970.² The fifth category analyzes the trends of institutes that displayed growth during the years studied. The final two categories consist of observations of brother-only institutes and monastic institutes, respectively.³

General Observations

The total membership among religious institutes of men has decreased dramatically across the last 45 years, from almost 42,000 in 1970 to fewer than 18,000 in 2015. This decline in numbers is notably greater than the corresponding decline in the number of diocesan priests in the United States over the same period. There are now 30 percent fewer diocesan priests than 45 years ago, while the number of men in religious life has declined by 58 percent. This drop is especially significant given the growing Catholic population in the United States, which has increased from 47,900,000 in 1970 to 68,100,000 in 2015.

The number of Catholics per diocesan priest has doubled over the last 45 years while the number of Catholics per religious priest or brother has more than tripled. Compared to 1970, proportionately more men are entering diocesan seminaries today than are entering the novitiates of religious institutes. This is a significant factor that affects U.S.

FIGURE 1. MEMBERSHIP IN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES OF MEN



Catholics’ exposure to, and experience with, men religious in their vast array of ministries in the Church.

While the number of men in religious institutes has declined over the past 45 years, the number of religious institutes of men listed in *The Official Catholic Directory* has increased. In 1970 there were 116 institutes listed; in 2015 there were 131. Twenty-four institutes that were not listed in 1970 are included in the 2015 OCD and nine institutes that were listed in 1970 are no longer included in 2015.

There are 14 religious institutes that reported growth in members during this period, increasing from 640 members to 1,227 members. In addition, there are 24 institutes that either did not have a presence in the United States in 1970 or came into existence since 1970. These 24 institutes report a combined total of 896 members in 2015.⁴ These new institutes are examined in depth in a later section of this report.

The size of religious institutes varies greatly. There are many institutes with fewer than 50 members as well as a handful of institutes with more than 1,000 members. In 1970, there were 42 institutes with 50 or fewer members and ten institutes with more than 1,000 men. In 2015, there are 68 institutes with 50 or fewer men and only three with more than 1,000 men.

The median⁵ size of a religious institute of men in 1970 was 109; in 2015 the median size was 40. This means that more than half of the religious institutes of men in the United States now have fewer than

50 members. Because the difference in membership size is so great among religious institutes, their membership trends are next examined here according to three categories of institute size in 1970: the ten largest institutes, the ten institutes surrounding the median, and the ten smallest institutes.

Largest Religious Institutes

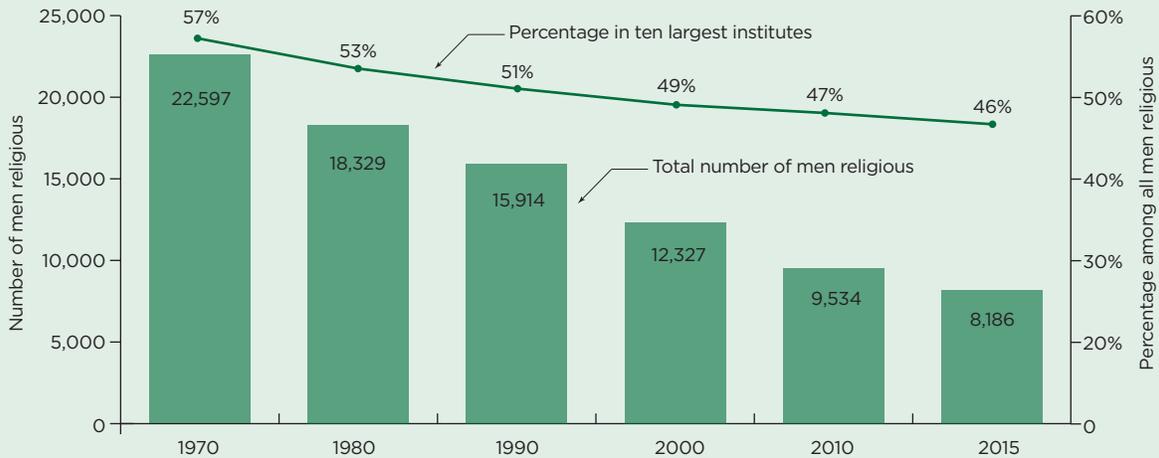
The ten largest religious institutes in the United States in 1970 contained 57 percent (or 22,597 members) of the total population in men’s religious institutes, which was 41,886 men. These ten are some of the most well-known religious institutes across the nation. For example, the Society of Jesus is known as a leader in education, sponsoring Fordham University, Georgetown University, Boston College, and 25 other colleges and universities. The Benedictine Monks, according to *The Official Catholic Directory*, have established more than 50 monasteries across the United States over the years.

Perhaps as a result of their various ministries, their international presence, or their sizable presence in the United States, seven of the ten largest institutes in 1970 are still among the seven largest institutes in 2015.⁶ These seven institutes also include a declining share of the total number of men in religious life throughout this period. As previously noted, the ten largest institutes included 57 percent of the total population of men religious in 1970, but by 2015 these same

TABLE 1. TEN LARGEST RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES OF MEN, 1970

Religious Initials	Religious Institute	1970	2015	Percentage Change 1970-2015
S.J.	Society of Jesus	7,628	2,325	-70%
O.F.M.	Franciscan Friars	3,252	1,147	-65%
O.S.B.	Benedictine Monks	2,516	1,324	-47%
F.S.C.	Brothers of the Christian Schools	2,212	589	-73%
S.M.	Society of Mary	1,311	630	-52%
C.Ss.R.	Redemptorist Fathers	1,293	210	-84%
O.P.	Order of Preachers	1,199	722	-40%
M.M.	Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers	1,112	352	-68%
O.F.M.Cap.	The Capuchin Franciscan Friars	1,044	623	-40%
O.M.I.	Oblates of Mary Immaculate	1,030	264	-74%
TOTALS		22,597	8,186	-64%

FIGURE 2. NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF MEN RELIGIOUS IN THE TEN LARGEST INSTITUTES OF MEN



institutes had only 46 percent of all men religious. As a group, the decline in membership among the ten largest institutes was steeper than the overall average across all religious institutes of men over the past 45 years.

Religious Institutes Surrounding the Median

The next category according to size examined for this study includes the ten religious institutes that surround the median in terms of size of institutes. In 1970, the median size among all religious institutes of men was 109. These institutes represent the 53rd to 64th largest institutes in the United States in 1970. Perhaps as a result of their smaller size, these institutes are somewhat less well-known than the ten largest institutes displayed in the previous section.

These ten institutes, unlike the ten largest, maintained a fairly steady share of the total population of men religious between 1970 and 2015. Among these ten institutes, their share of the total population of male religious was 2.9 percent in 1970 and 2.4 percent in 2015.

Smallest Religious Institutes

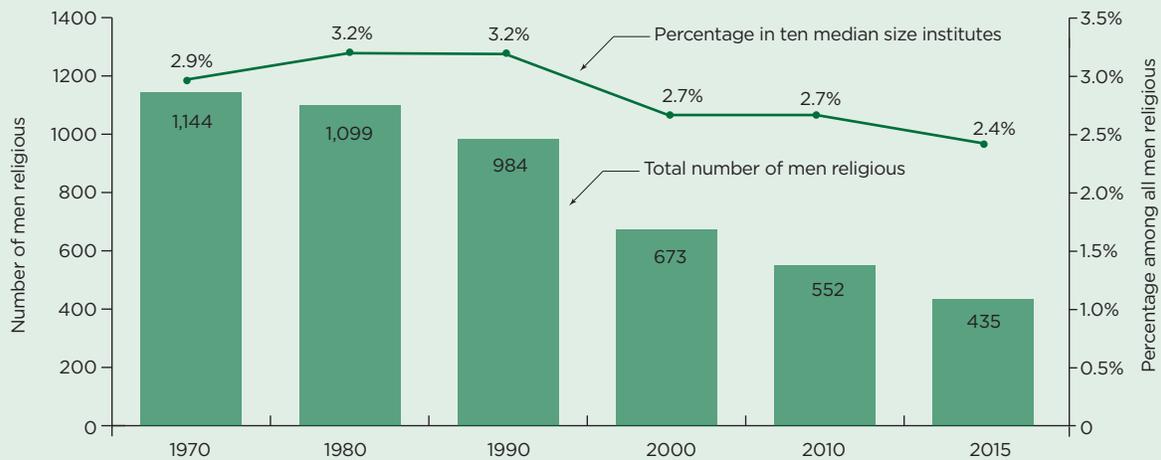
This category includes the ten smallest institutes according to membership reported in 1970.⁷ Although they ranged in size from twelve to three, several exhibited peculiar trends of growth. Unlike the trends seen in the largest and median size institutes, these smaller institutes were among the handful that actually increased membership over the period studied. Table 3 displays the name of the ten smallest religious institutes, their membership in 1970 and 2015, and the overall percentage change in membership between 1970 and 2015.

The smallest religious institutes increased overall in their percentage share of the total number of men in religious institutes over the

TABLE 2. TEN MEDIAN SIZE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES OF MEN, 1970

Religious Initials	Religious Institute	1970	2015	Percentage Change 1970–2015
M.S.C.	Missionaries of the Sacred Heart	152	68	-55%
S.A.C.	Society of the Catholic Apostolate	149	62	-58%
F.I.C.	Brothers of Christian Instruction	123	18	-85%
S.S.E.	Society of St. Edmund	122	30	-75%
G.H.M	The Glenmary Home Missioners	111	61	-45%
C.S.S.	Sigmatine Fathers and Brothers	107	14	-87%
M.I.C.	Marians of the Immaculate Conception	102	79	-23%
C.F.P.	Brothers of the Poor of St. Francis	99	14	-86%
M.S.F.	Missionaries of the Holy Family	90	23	-74%
O.A.R.	Order of Augustinian Recollects	89	66	-26%
TOTALS		1,144	435	-62%

FIGURE 3. NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF MEN RELIGIOUS IN THE TEN MEDIAN SIZE INSTITUTES OF MEN



45 years studied. In 1970, these institutes contained 0.16 percent of the total membership in religious institutes of men. By 2015, this had grown to 0.71 percent of the total membership. Although their increase is not numerically high, it is notable insofar as it represents an overall increase from their original share of the total membership. Across all 45 years, their net increase was 58 members. It may seem like a negligible fluctuation, but for an institute like the Order of Carthusians to grow from five to 15 members is still notable at

a time when the overall decline in membership for men religious is 55 percent. Figure 4 displays the combined membership in these ten smallest institutes as well as their share of the overall population in religious institutes of men for each time period.

TABLE 3. TEN SMALLEST RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES OF MEN, 1970

Religious Initials	Religious Institute	1970	2015	Percentage Change 1970-2015
C.J.	Josephite Fathers	12	9	-25%
F.S.E.	Brothers of the Holy Eucharist	12	-	-100%
M.SS.CC.	Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary	9	9	0%
M.Sp.S.	Missionaries of the Holy Spirit	7	37	429%
C.R.M.	Adorno Fathers	7	17	143%
C.R.S.	Somascan Fathers	6	10	67%
O.de.M.	Order of Our Lady of Mercy	5	24	380%
O.CART.	Order of Carthusians	5	15	200%
F.D.P.	Sons of Divine Providence	3	5	67%
M.E.P.	Paris Foreign Mission Society	3	1	-67%
TOTALS		69	127	84%

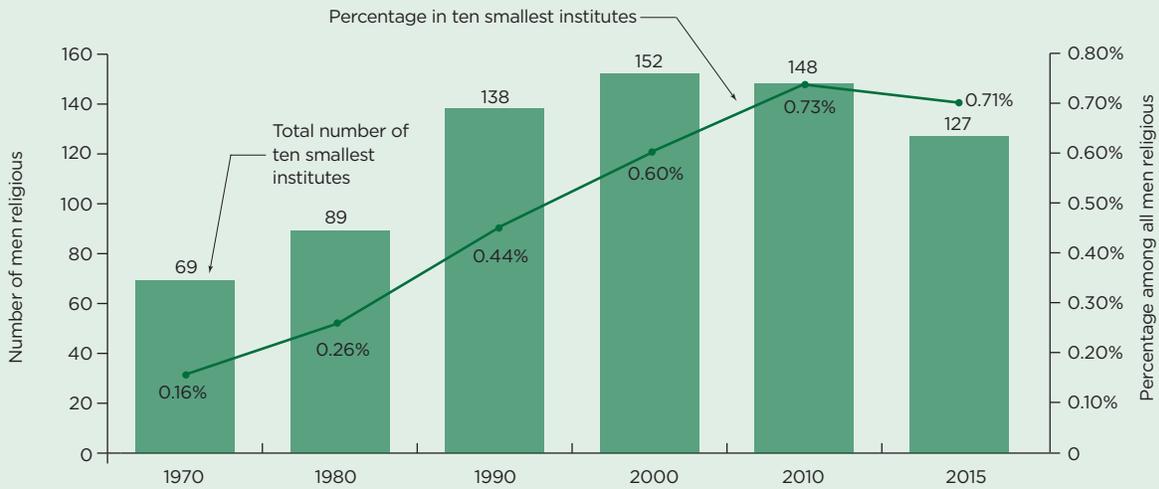
As Table 3 indicates, six of the ten institutes in the smallest category experienced growth over the period studied. One institute fluctuated, but in the end held the same membership—an accomplishment given the overall decrease among men religious. The other three institutes decreased in membership. These institutes may have grown largely as a function of their very small size. When an institute is small, it often has a very clearly-defined charism that can attract new vocations.

New Religious Institutes

This category refers to religious institutes of men that either established foundations in the United States, were newly founded in the United States, or began reporting their numbers to *The Official Catholic Directory* after 1970.⁸ The groups that appear in this category are mostly small in size, and the percentage change in their reported membership over the period studied varied greatly. The following figure displays the total number of new institutes reported for each time period along with the average size of all new institutes.

Half of these new institutes experienced some growth between the point at which they began reporting their membership to OCD and 2015. Two others maintained the same size across the reporting period and the rest decreased in membership over this period. Only one institute in this group reported no members in 2015.

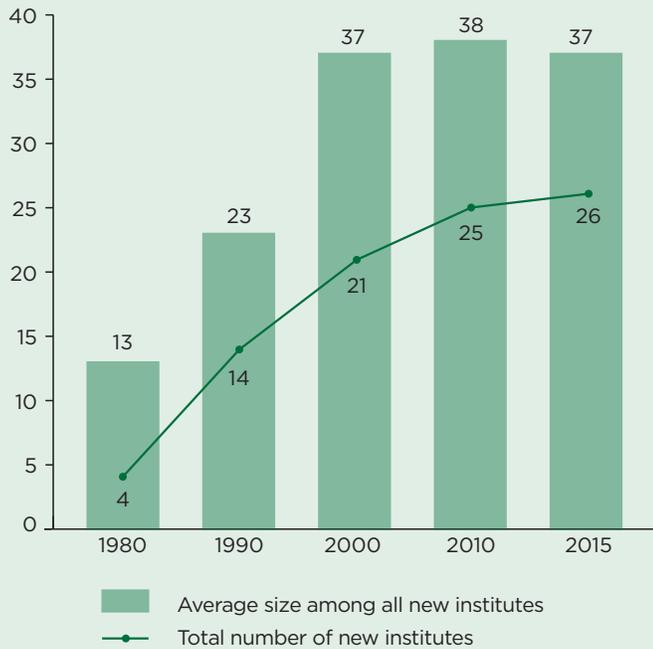
FIGURE 4. NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF MEN RELIGIOUS IN THE TEN SMALLEST INSTITUTES OF MEN



As expected, the percentage share among all religious institutes of men in the United States increased for these institutes that began reporting members in the United States after 1970. We can conclude from this that religious institutes of men that began reporting members after 1970—especially those institutes from outside the United States that established a new presence in the United States—

helped to slow somewhat the rapidly declining number of priests and brothers in religious life by adding their own numbers to the existing religious institutes of men in the United States. In 1970, since none of them were listed in the OCD, they had zero percent of the share of overall members in religious institutes of men. By 2015, their share of the overall total increased to slightly over 5 percent.

FIGURE 5. AVERAGE SIZE AND TOTAL COUNT OF NEW RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES OF MEN



Only two of these new institutes had more than 40 members and continually increased in size at each time period. Both of these originated in other countries before initiating their ministry in the United States. The Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (C.M.I.) began in India in 1855 and did not establish a presence in the United States until the 1980s. They reported 38 members in the United States in 1990 and have grown to 109 in 2015. The other larger new institute is the Missionary Society of St. Paul of Nigeria (M.S.P.), founded in 1978 in Nigeria. They sent their first members to the USA in 1986. In 2000 they listed 20 members in the United States, growing to 49 in 2015.

Institutes with Growing Membership

There are 13 religious institutes of men listed in OCD that have increased their membership between 1970 and 2015. This category does not include institutes that were first listed after 1970. These 13 institutes have added 587 members, or an increase of 93 percent from 631 to 1,218 members. Almost two-thirds of this increase belongs to the Legionaires of Christ who went from 28 members in the United States to 396 members over the 45 years. The Piarist Fathers, Society of Christ, and the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit each added 30 to 48 members over the same period of time, and have drawn many of their members from outside of the United States.

TABLE 4. INSTITUTES WITH GROWING MEMBERSHIP, 1970-2015

Religious Initials	Religious Institute	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015	Increase 1970-2015
L.C.	Legionaries of Christ	28	28	123	263	444	396	368
SCH.P.	Piarist Fathers	60	71	75	88	75	108	48
S.CH.	Society of Christ	22	28	38	53	57	61	39
M.Sp.S.	Missionaries of the Holy Spirit	7	12	28	50	46	37	30
M.S.A.	Society of the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles	15	24	56	48	44	40	25
C.S.J.	Congregation of St. Joseph	18	16	19	25	31	42	24
O.de.M.	Order of Our Lady of Mercy	5	5	23	31	27	24	19
O.CART.	Order of Carthusians	5	11	20	11	14	15	10
C.R.M.	Adorno Fathers	7	8	10	10	15	17	10
C.O.	Oratorians	32	28	26	34	39	37	5
C.R.S.	Somascan Fathers	6		3	9	11	10	4
S.V.D.	Society of the Divine Word	423	392	426	373	365	426	3
F.D.P.	Sons of Divine Providence	3	16	13	10	10	5	2

Brother-Only Religious Institutes

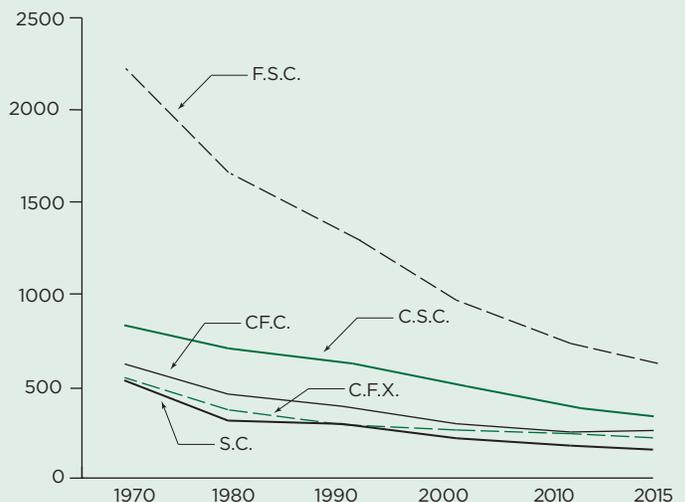
The United States is currently home to 19 religious institutes that are exclusively for brothers. Their apostolates are focused in such a way that they are not engaged in sacramental ministry. A few of these institutes have a handful of priests who serve within their own community. The five largest groups of brother-only institutes in the United States are: the Brothers of the Christian Schools (F.S.C.), the Brothers of the Congregation of Holy Cross (C.S.C.), the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers (C.F.C.), the Brothers of Saint Francis Xavier (C.F.X.), and the Brothers of the Sacred Heart (S.C.).

The category of brother-only institutes represents a wide range in terms of membership size. For example, the Brothers of the Christian Schools had 2,212 members in 1970 while the smallest recurring group, the Brothers of the Congregation of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, had 13 members in 1970. Although these two institutes represent opposite end-points in the data, they are both part of an intriguing case study when it comes to brother-only religious institutes.

In 1970, the total membership in the 20 brother-only institutes included in the OCD was 6,248. Over the course of 45 years two of those initial 20 institutes ceased to exist in the United States. Two other brother-only institutes were begun in the United States after 1970 but no longer existed by 2015, and one new brother-only institute was begun in the United States after 1970 and was still listed in 2015. By 2015, only 19 brother-only institutes were listed in the OCD and their overall membership had decreased by 70 percent, to

1,896 brothers. As noted previously, the overall rate of decline among religious institutes of men across this time period was 55 percent, so the brother-only institutes decreased 15 percentage points more than the overall average. The combined membership among the 19 brother-only institutes in 2015 (1,896 members) is less than the number reported by just one brother-only institute in 1970—the Brothers of the Christian Schools (F.S.C.) reported 2,212 members in that year.

FIGURE 6. MEMBERSHIP IN THE FIVE LARGEST INSTITUTES OF BROTHERS



Across these 45 years, the numbers entering religious institutes of men overall have declined, but the numbers entering brother-only institutes have declined even more than the overall average. The size of the brother-only institute does not appear to affect the percentage change over time. For example, the Hospitaller Brothers of St. John of God had 35 members in 1970, but decreased by only one member by 2015 (a 3 percent decline). Meanwhile, the Brothers of St. Patrick had 30 members in 1970 and decreased by 25 members by 2015 (an 83 percent decline). Although both institutes were nearly the same size in 1970, the variation in their overall percentage change seems to indicate that small size was not a determinant factor of their decrease.

Monastic Institutes

The final category of religious institutes of men that CARA explores in this study is the monastic institutes. In the United States, these institutes include the Benedictine Monks (O.S.B.), the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance (O.C.S.O.), the Cistercian Fathers (O.CIST.), the Camaldolese Hermits of the Congregation of Montecorona (ER. CAM.), and the Order of Carthusians (O.CART.).

For this study, the monastic congregations are grouped here into five institutes but in reality each of these comprises a number of distinct abbeys. For example, the Benedictine Monks were located in 55 different abbeys across this 45-year period. These abbeys averaged about 35 men per abbey over this period.

A small but consistent trend is that the membership in these monastic institutes constitutes an increasing proportion of the total population of men in religious institutes, as can be seen in Figure 7. Over the

past 45 years, the proportion of all men religious who are members of monastic institutes increased from 7.8 percent to 9.8 percent of all men religious.

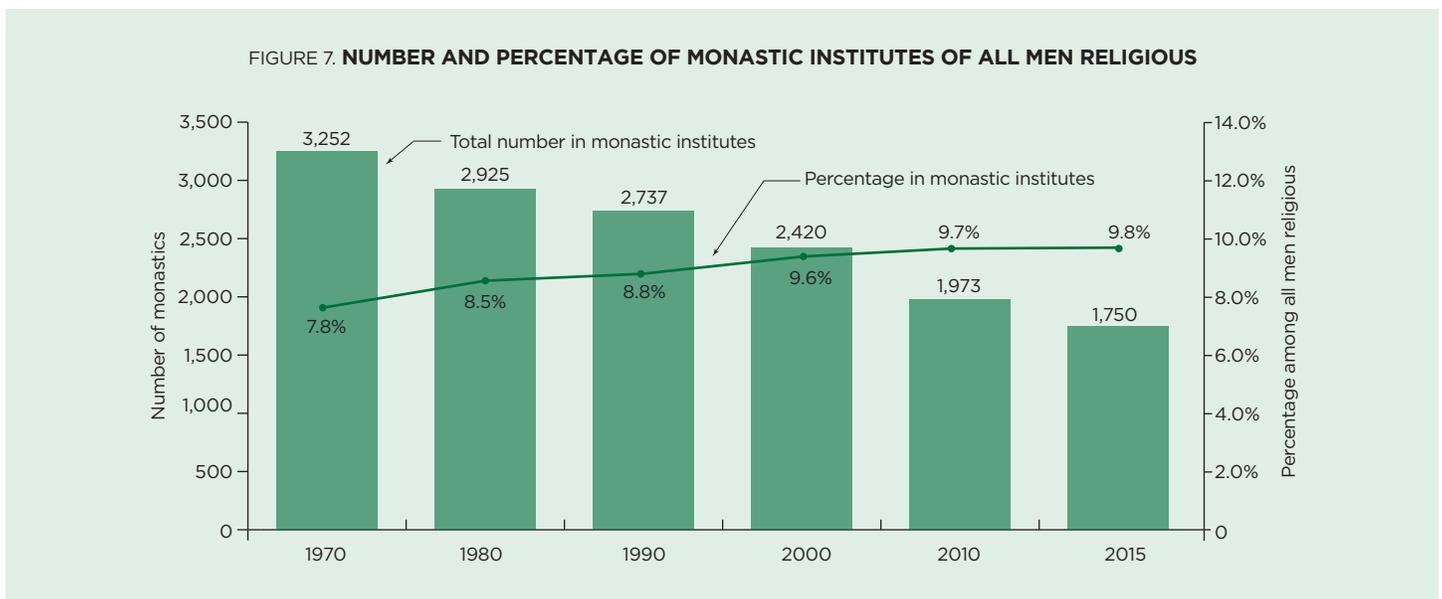
Conclusions

The number of men in religious institutes in the United States has declined sharply over the past 45 years, but not all institutes experienced this decline equally. Some had a gradual decline in membership and a few others even experienced growth in membership. Several religious institutes of men went out of existence in the United States during this time and a few new institutes were created.

“The number of men in religious institutes in the United States has declined sharply over the past 45 years, but not all institutes experienced this decline equally.”

The most apparent decline occurred among the largest religious institutes of men. Their very large membership and the great number of their sponsored ministries across the United States helped make their decline highly visible over the years. The Jesuits and the Brothers of the Christian Schools are the most prominent examples, as their diminished numbers resulted in their withdrawal from many sponsored ministries such as parishes and schools.

During this same period of declining membership a few new religious institutes have been established, many from outside of



the United States. While some of their growth has come from new vocations within the United States, much of it appears to come from members “missioned” here from other countries.

About 10 percent of the religious institutes of men listed in *The Official Catholic Directory* show a net increase in numbers from 1970 to 2015. With one or two exceptions, much of this increase in membership is from international religious institutes of men sending missionaries to the United States, which has bolstered U.S. religious life in a small but notable way.

The story of religious institutes of men in the United States since 1970 is more complex than a simple narrative of overall decline would suggest. The categories explored in this report suggest some of the richness to be found in the data. Further research should explore the broader implications of these trends regionally around the world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Financial support for compilation of the database and preparation of this Special Report was provided by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

ENDNOTES

1. Most priests, worldwide, are diocesan (also referred to as secular priests). Diocesan priests are ordained for a particular diocese and serve ordinarily in parishes or other ministries of the diocese in which they are located. At their ordination, they incardinate (affiliate) with the diocese and make a promise of obedience to the bishop who heads the diocese and (in the Roman rite) to remain celibate. Religious priests (and brothers) make public vows of poverty, celibate chastity, and obedience in a religious order. These men typically live in community with other priests and/or brothers of the same religious congregation (e.g. Franciscans, Jesuits, Benedictines, Dominicans).
2. A significant number of institutes were either founded or came to the United States after 1970. Since these institutes had a membership of zero in 1970, the analysis of overall trends would have been skewed by their presence. As a result, CARA analyzed these groups as a separate category.
3. *The Official Catholic Directory* contains a list of Religious Institutes of Brothers, which was used to identify the institutes that we classify as brother-only. CARA consulted the Conference of Major Superiors of Men for a list of monastic institutes.
4. CARA worked diligently to ensure accurate figures for the membership of each religious institute. It is possible that some religious institutes exist in the United States that either are not listed in the OCD or elect not to provide their numbers to OCD. Nevertheless, *The Official Catholic Directory* is the most comprehensive listing of religious institutes of men in the United States and its data are the most reliable data available for this study.
5. Median is the value at the midpoint of a distribution of observed values. In other words, when all religious institutes in a particular year are arranged according to size, the median is the middle value—the point at which half of the institutes are larger and half are smaller.
6. The other three rank at 13, 17, and 23.
7. The Brothers of St. Joseph only reported numbers for 1970, so they were excluded from this analysis.
8. The Brothers of Charity, the Franciscan Friars of Mary Immaculate, the Vocationist Fathers, the Missionary Servants of Christ, the Maronite Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Minim Fathers, the Franciscan Brothers of the Sacred Heart, the Institute of Christ the King-Sovereign Priest, and the Order of Penitents were excluded from the analysis because they reported numbers for just one of the years studied.



CARA was founded by Catholic leaders in 1964 to put social science research tools at the service of the Catholic Church in the United States. For information on CARA and its mission of research, analysis, and planning, contact:

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