

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



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

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***Women and Men Professing Perpetual Vows
in Religious Life:
The Profession Class of 2023***

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***Women and Men Professing Perpetual Vows
in Religious Life: The Profession Class of 2023***

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a national survey of women and men religious who professed perpetual vows in 2023 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 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 2023. 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 508 of 737 major superiors, for an overall response rate of 69% among religious institutes. In all, the major superiors provided contact information for 144 members (68 women and 76 men) who professed perpetual vows in religious life in 2023.

Of these 144 identified women and men religious, a total of 101 religious members - 53 sisters and 48 brothers and priests - responded to the survey by January 6, 2023. This represents a response rate of 71% of the 144 potential members of the Profession Class of 2023 that were reported to CARA by major superiors of men and women religious.

Major Findings

Demographic Background

- A total of 508 major superiors (87% of respondents) report that they had no one professing perpetual vows in 2023. One in ten institutes (9%) had one perpetual profession. Another 23 major superiors (4%) report from two to 15 members professing perpetual vows in 2023. In total, the religious institutes report 144 newly perpetually professed members (68 women and 76 men) in 2023.
- The average age of responding religious of the Profession Class of 2023 is 36. Half of the responding religious are age 33 or younger. The youngest is 24 and the oldest is 78.
- Three in four responding religious (76%) were born in the United States. On average, the respondents who were born outside the United States were 19 years old when they first came to the United States and lived here for 18 years before perpetual profession.
- Two in three responding religious (67%) report their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian, European American, or white. One in ten or less identifies as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian (12%), as Hispanic/Latino(a) (9%), as African/African American/black (7%), and as mixed race or other (5%).
- Nine in ten responding religious (90%) have been Catholic since birth. Among those who became Catholic later in life, their average age at the time of their conversion was 24.

Family Background

- Almost all respondents (94%) report that when they were children, they had at least one parent who was Catholic. Nearly nine in ten (86%) report that both parents were Catholic.
- Three in ten (30%) report having a relative who is a priest or a religious.
- Almost all (99%) respondents were raised by their biological parents during the most formative part of their childhood. Besides, one in sixteen (7%) report being raised by their grandparents during the most formative part of their childhood.
- During the most formative part of their childhood, nearly nine in ten (88%) respondents were raised by a married couple, living together. One in 20 respondents was raised by one parent who was divorced or separated. Three percent were raised by one parent who was single/unmarried. Three percent were raised by an unmarried couple who lived together, or married couple living separately, or one parent who was widowed.
- Almost all responding religious (97%) of the Profession Class of 2023 have at least one sibling. About one in five (23%) has one brother or sister. Just over two in five (42%) report having two or three. A third (32%) have four or more siblings.

- A quarter (26%) of respondents are the eldest in their family. More than four in ten (43%) of respondents are somewhere in the middle of their family. Three in ten (29%) are the youngest. Just 3% are the only child in his or her family.

Educational Background

- Half of the responding religious (51%) 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 (46% of responding religious, compared to 8% of U.S. adult Catholics) and much more likely to have attended a Catholic college (43% of responding religious, compared to 5% of U.S. adult Catholics).
- Nearly three in five respondents (57%) participated in a religious education program/CCD/RCIA in their parish. Almost one in five (18%) reports that they participated in a Catholic ministry formation program before they entered their religious institute.
- Approximately one in six (14%) responding religious reports being home schooled at some time in their educational background. Among those who were home schooled, the average length of time they were home schooled was nine years.
- The Profession Class of 2023 is highly educated. Two in ten responding religious (20%) earned a graduate degree before entering their religious institute. About six in ten (62%) entered their religious institute with at least a bachelor's degree.
- Most responding religious did not report that educational debt delayed their application for entrance to their institute. Among 9% of respondents who did report educational debt, however, they averaged about less than a year of delay while they paid down an average of \$36,667 in educational debt. Friends and family members are the most common source of assistance for paying down educational debt.

Work and Ministry Experiences

- About four in five (82%) had work experience prior to entering their religious institute. More than half (55%) were employed full-time and about a quarter (27%) were employed part-time before entering their religious institute. Among those who report work experience, the main work fields are business, education, and healthcare.
- More than eight in ten responding religious (84%) 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 experiences reported by respondents were as altar servers (51%), in youth ministry/campus ministry (50%), in faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA (48%), and as lectors (46%).
- More than nine in ten (93%) participated in one or more religious programs or activities before entering their religious institute, with the most common ministries being lectors

(55%), altar servers (54%), and youth ministry or youth group (45%). Roughly two-fifths of respondents served as extraordinary ministers of Communion (42%) and participated in faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA (37%). About a third (35%) participated in music ministry (34%) and social service ministry.

Vocational Discernment

- Almost all responding religious of the Profession Class of 2023 (96%) participated in one or more of these prayer practices or groups on a regular basis prior to entering their religious institute. Eight in ten (82%) participated in Eucharistic Adoration. About seven in ten respondents (72%) recited the rosary, participated in a retreat (72%), or had spiritual direction before entering their religious institute (69%).
- On average, respondents report that they were 18 years old when they first considered a vocation to religious life, with half being 18 or younger when they first did so.
- About eight in ten (82%) responding religious report that someone encouraged them to consider a vocation to religious life. More than two in five reported being encouraged by a parish priest (45%). Two in five reported being encouraged by a friend (41%).
- More than half (55%) 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 (64% compared with 37% of men religious).
- On average, respondents report having known the members of their religious institute for four years before they entered. Almost three-tenths (28%) report being first acquainted with their institute in/through a sponsored institution or work of the institute (e.g., school, hospital). A quarter report being first acquainted with their institute through print or online promotional material published by the institute (26%).
- Most (94%) had participated in at least one of vocational discernment programs 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. Nearly four in five (77%) report participating in this program before they entered their religious institute.

Introduction

Since 2010, the Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University to conduct a survey of women and men religious who profess perpetual vows each year in a religious congregation, province, or monastery based in the United States. For this project, CARA was asked to gather information about the characteristics and experiences of these religious and report the findings to the Secretariat for use with the World Day of Consecrated Life in February. For this year's survey, 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 2023.

To obtain the names and contact information for these women and CARA contacted all major superiors of men and women religious institutes 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 2023. 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 508 of 737 major superiors, for an overall response rate of 69% among religious institutes. In all, the major superiors provided contact information for 144 members (68 women and 76 men) who professed perpetual vows in religious life in 2023.

Of these 144 identified women and men religious, a total of 101 religious members - 53 sisters and 48 brothers and priests - responded to the survey by January 6, 2023. This represents a response rate of 71% of the 144 potential members of the Profession Class of 2023 that were reported to CARA by major superiors of men and women religious.

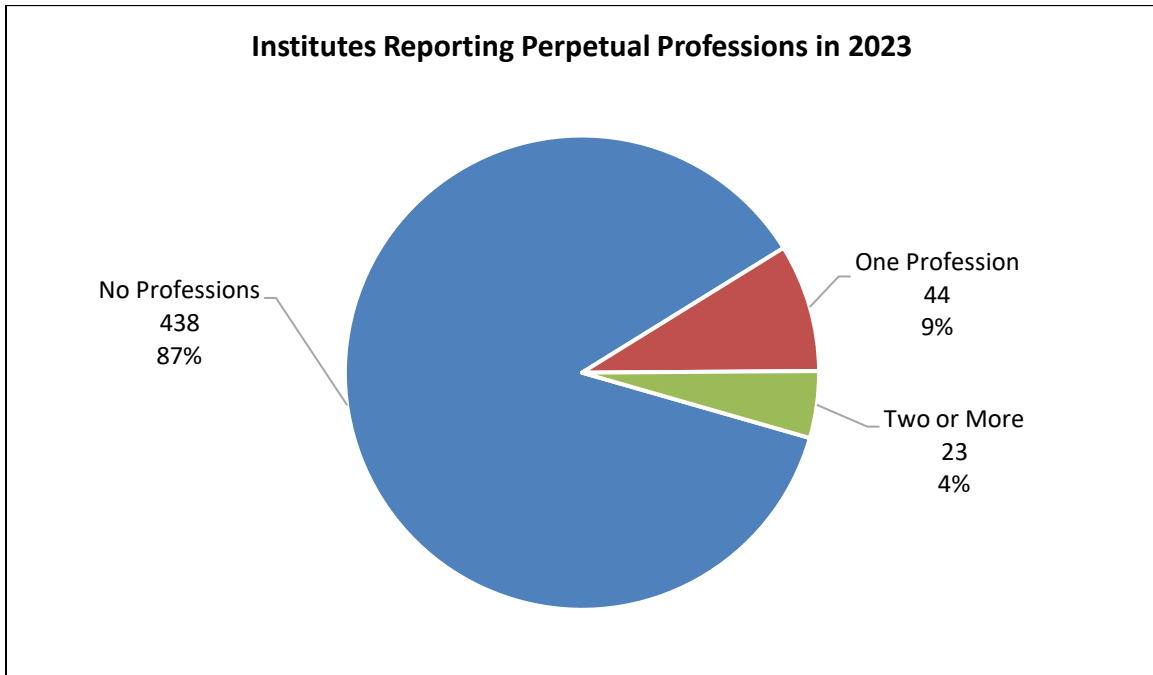
The questionnaire asked these religious about their demographic and religious background, education and work experience, previous ministry or service and other formative experiences, encouragement, and discouragement to consider religious life, initial acquaintance with their institutes, and vocation/discernment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

Part I: Demographics of Responding Religious

In Part I, the demographic characteristics of the religious institutes responding as well as the responding women and men religious are described.

Institutes Reporting Perpetual Profession

CARA asked the 737 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 2023. A total of 508 major superiors responded (a 69% response rate) with 144 names of perpetually professed sisters, priests, and brothers.



A total of 438 major superiors (87% of respondents) report that they had no one professing perpetual vows in 2023. One in ten institutes (9%) had one perpetual profession. Another 23 major superiors (4%) report from two to 15 members professing perpetual vows in 2023.

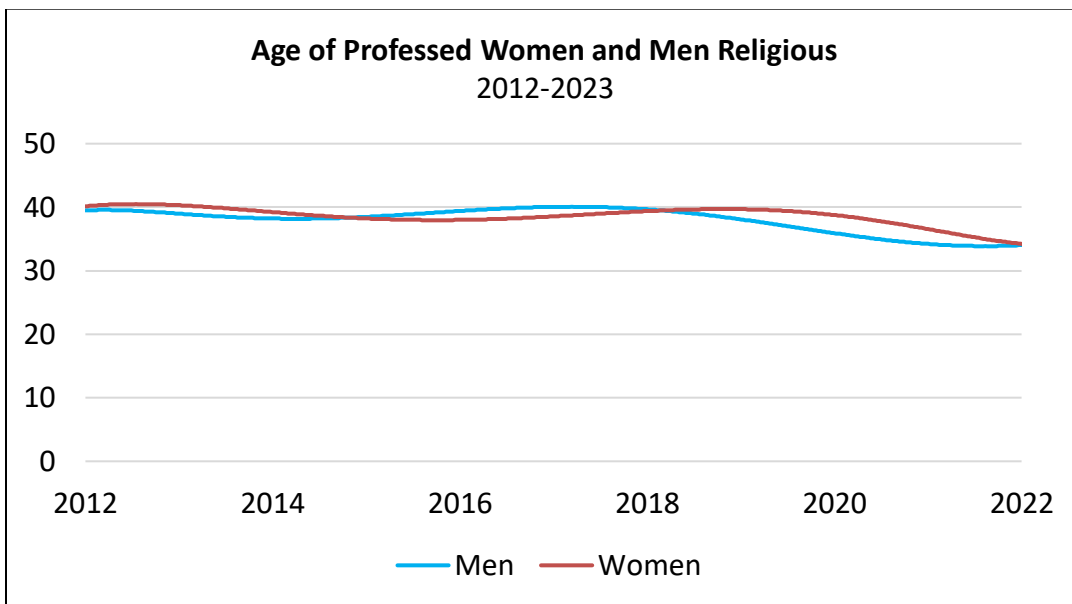
The sisters and nuns who responded to the survey represent 21 different religious institutes, provinces, or monasteries of women religious. Similarly, the brothers and priests who responded come from 27 different religious institutes, provinces, or monasteries of men religious.

Age of Perpetual Profession

Responding religious making perpetual profession in 2023 were, on average, 36 years old. Half were 33 years or younger.

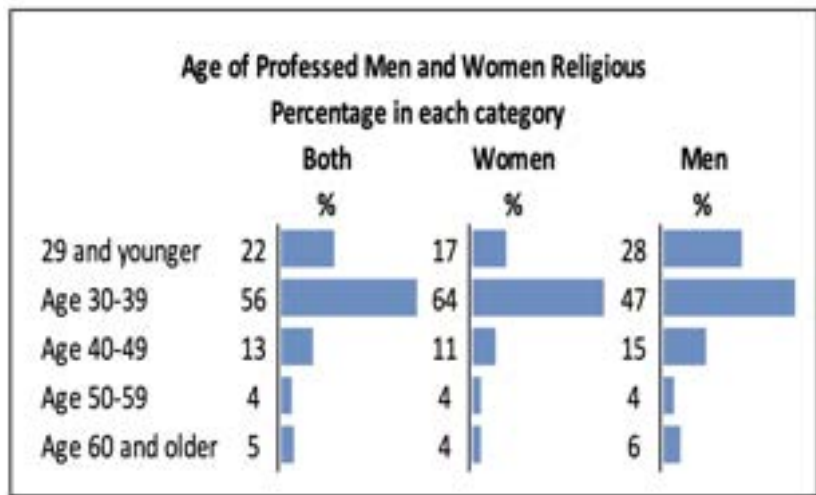
Age of Professed Women and Men			
<i>Percentage in each age category</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Average age	36	35	36
Median age	33	33	33
Range in ages	24-78	26-61	24-78

As can be seen in the figure below, the ages of the newly perpetually professed have ranged between 33 and 41 during the years the survey has been conducted.



One in five respondents (20%) makes final profession at the age of 29 or younger. The youngest are 24 years of age. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 21% and ranged between 13% and 27%.

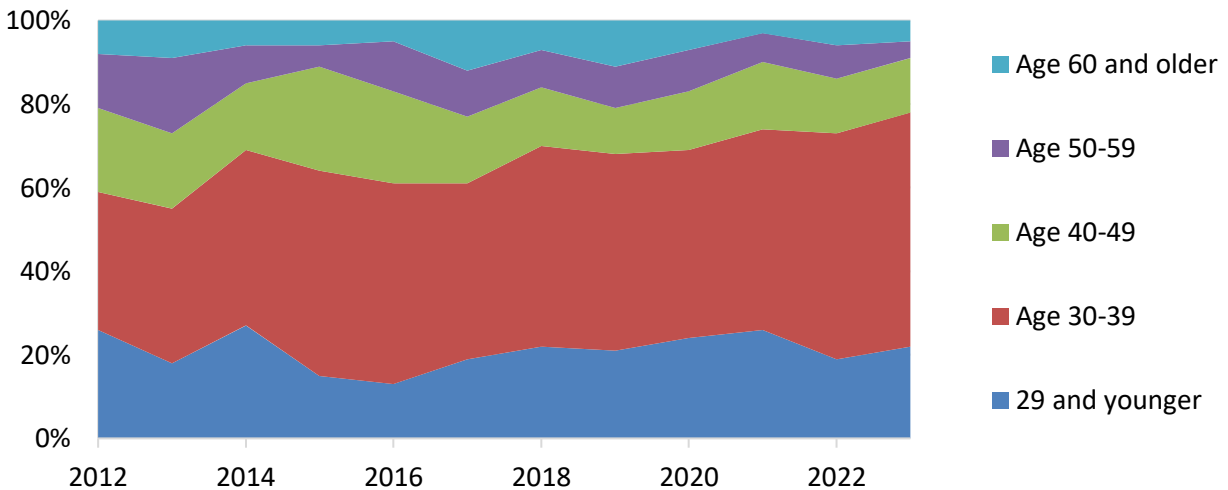
More than half (56%) profess perpetual vows at age 30 to 39. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 46% and ranged between 33% and 56%.



One in nine (13%) make perpetual profession between the ages 40 and 49. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 17% and ranged between 11% and 25%.

One in ten (9%) does so at age 50 or older. The oldest sister made her final profession at the age of 61, and the oldest brother made his final profession at the age of 78. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 17% and ranged between 9% and 28%.

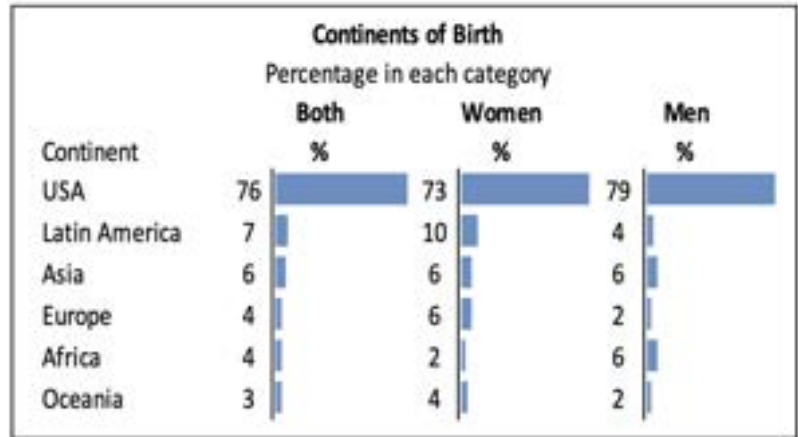
**Age When Professing Perpetual Vows
2012-2023**



Country of Birth

Four in five responding religious (76%) were born in the United States. One in five (22%) was born outside the United States. These respondents identified a total of 17 different countries of origin.

Between 2012 and 2023, their share among men and women religious born in the United States averaged 74% and ranged between 62% and 77%.



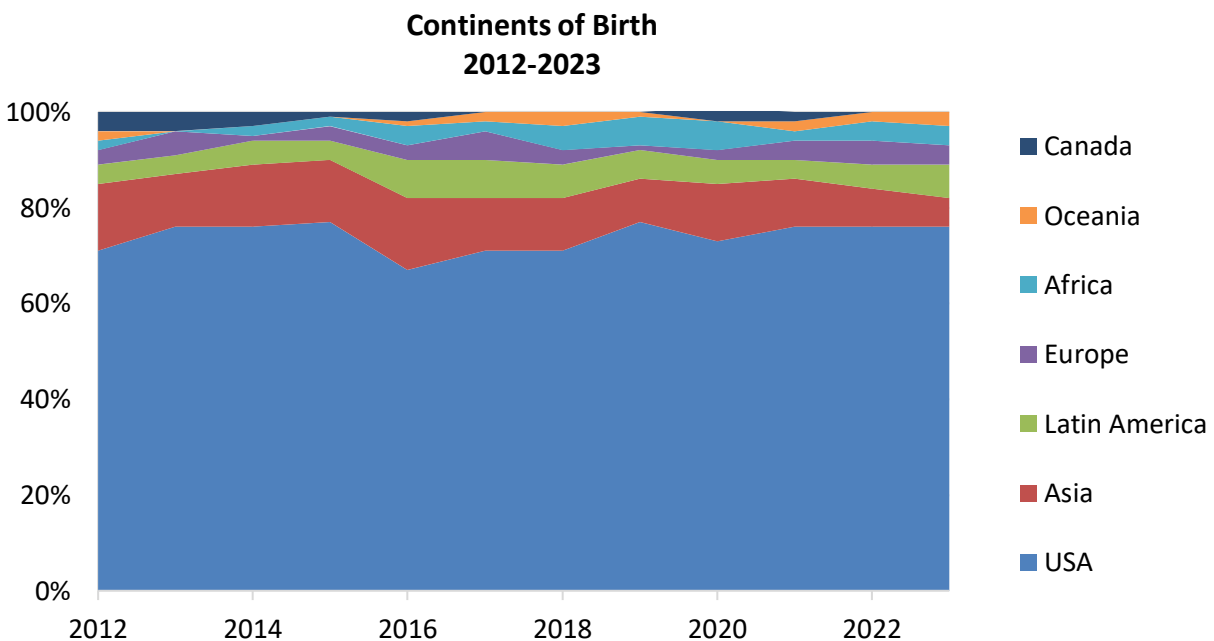
Seven percent were born in Latin America. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 6%, and ranged between 4% and 8%.

Six percent were born in Asia. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 11%, and ranged between 6% and 15%.

Four percent were born in Europe. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 3%, and ranged between 1% and 6%.

Four percent were born in Africa. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 3%, and ranged between 0% and 6%.

Four percent were born in Oceania. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 1%, and ranged between 0% and 6%.

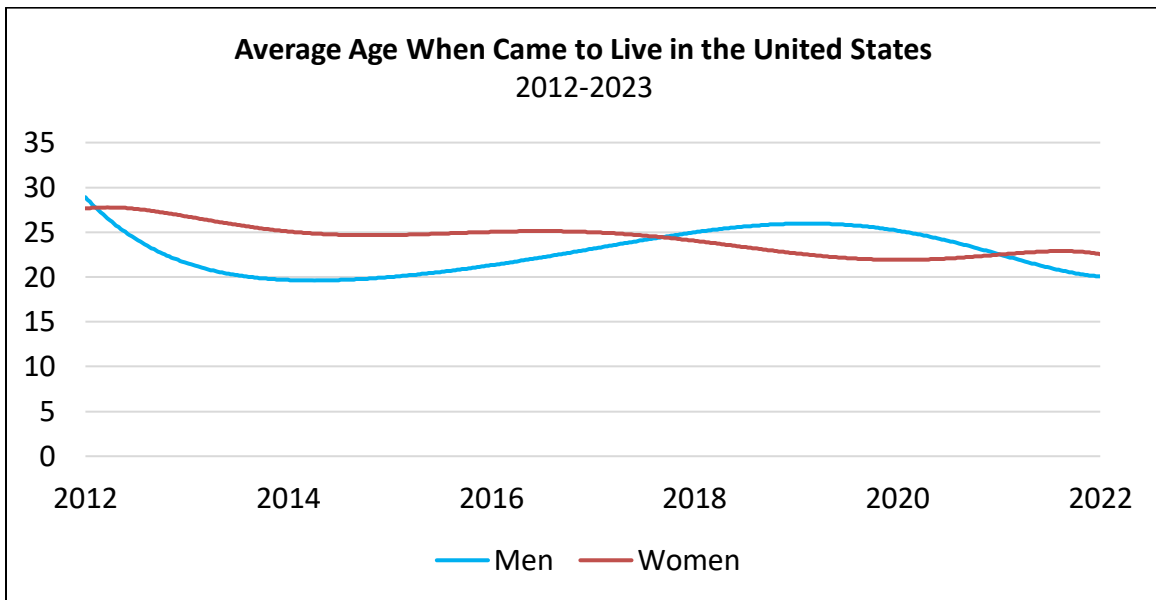


Foreign-born Religious' Age at Entry to the United States

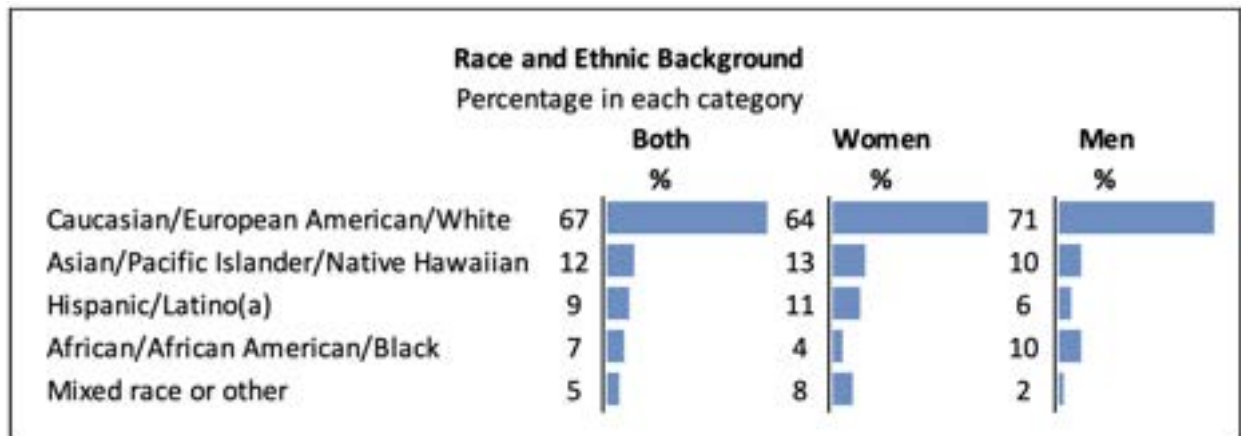
On average, responding foreign-born religious came to live in the United States at age 19. Half were age 21 or younger when they came to live in the United States. The youngest came to the United States at the age of one; the oldest entered the United States at the age of 40.

Entrance to the United States				
	<u>Year</u>	<u>Age at Entry</u>		
	Both	Both	Women	Men
Mean	2005	19	16	24
Median	2014	21	19	26
Range	1966-2022	1-40	1-40	3-39

Responding women religious, on average, were 19 years old when they came to live in the United. Since 2012, the average age was 23 and ranged between 15 and 28.



Racial and Ethnic Background



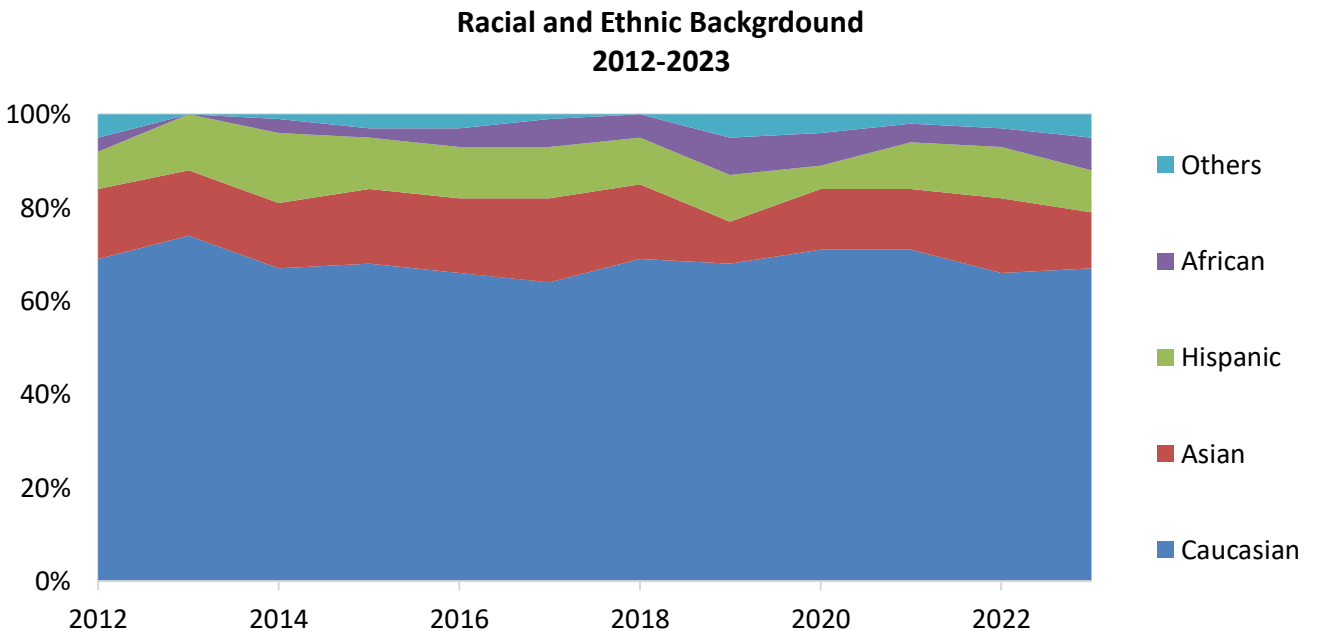
Two in three responding religious (67%) report their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian, European American, or white. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 68%, and ranged between 64% and 74%.

One in ten (12%) responding members identifies as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 14%, and ranged between 9% and 18%.

One in ten identifies as Hispanic/Latino(a). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 10%, and ranged between 5% and 15%.

One in sixteen identifies as African/African American/black. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 4%, and ranged between 0% and 8%.

Five percent of respondents identify as mixed race or other. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 3%, and ranged between 0% and 5%.



Differences by Country of Birth

Among those who were born in the United States, almost nine in ten responding religious (87%) identify themselves as Caucasian/European American/White. Among those who were born outside the United States, four in ten (37%) identify as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, 22% as Hispanic/Latino(a), 14% as Caucasian/European American/white, and another 14% as African/African American/black.

Part II: Family Background

The family backgrounds of the responding women and men religious are described in Part II.

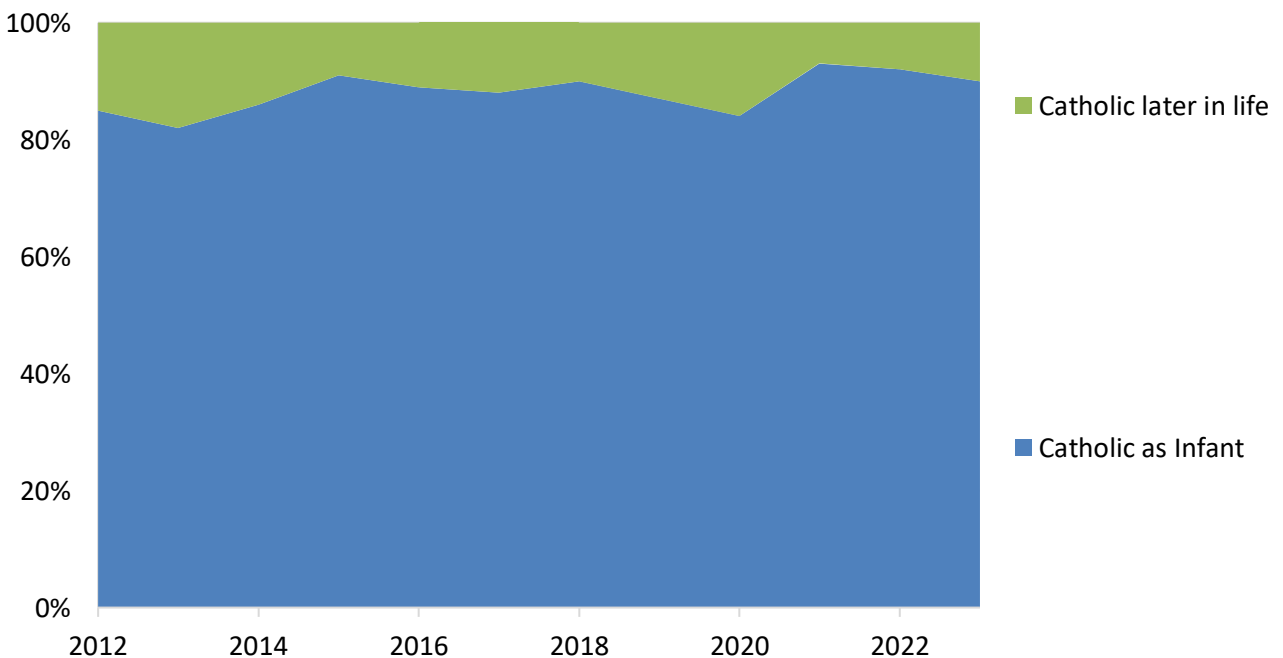
Religious Background

Nine in ten responding religious (90%) have been Catholic since birth. Among those who became Catholic later in life, their average age at the time of their conversion was 24.

Catholic Background			
<i>Percentage responding</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Catholic since birth	90	94	85
Became Catholic later in life	10	6	15
Average age at entering the Church	24	33	20

Those who came into full communion with the Catholic Church from another denomination or those who converted from another faith tradition came from a variety of faiths: Baptist, Evangelical, Evangelical Protestant, no affiliation (parents were non practicing Catholics and Lutherans), Southern Baptist, Protestant, non-Roman Catholic Christian, and non-denominational evangelical, then Anglican for 5 years (ACNA).

How long have you been a Catholic?
2012-2023



Family Religious Background

Almost all respondents (94%) report that when they were children, they had at least one parent who was Catholic. Nearly nine in ten (86%) report that both parents were Catholic. Women religious are more likely than men religious to report that both of their parents were Catholic. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 79%, and range from 75% and 86%.

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

Percentage responding

	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Both parents Catholic	86	91	81
Mother Catholic, father not	6	4	9
Neither parent was Catholic	6	4	9
Father Catholic, mother not	2	2	2

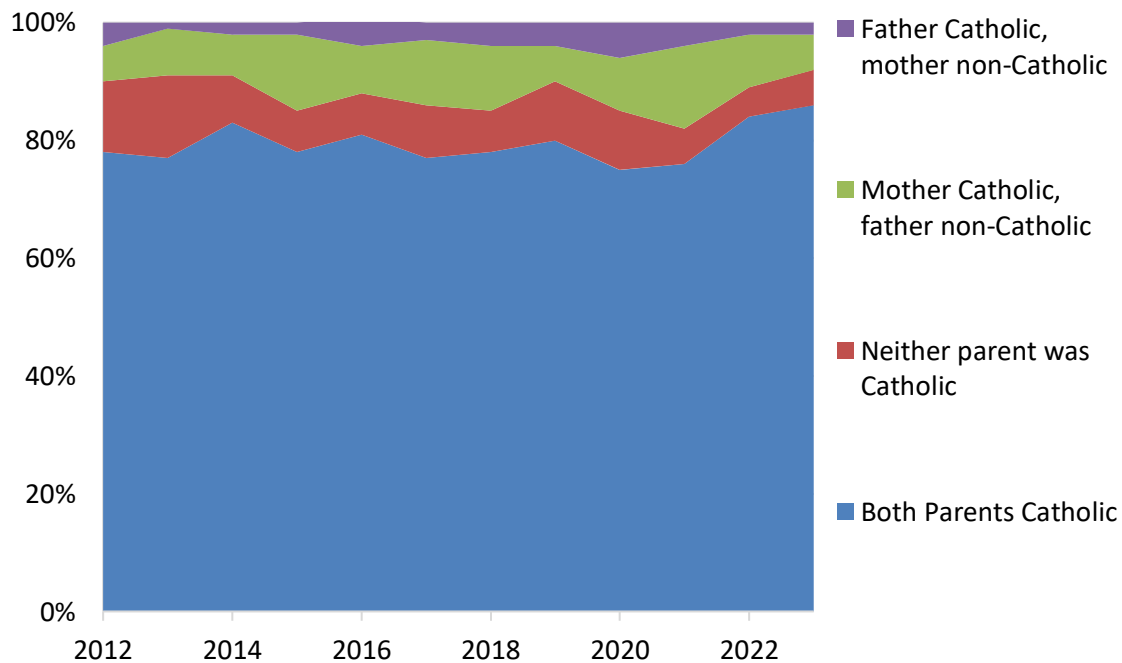
Six percent reports their mother was Catholic but not their father when they were a child. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 9%, and ranged from 6% and 14%.

Two percent reports their father was Catholic but not their mother when they were a child. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 3%, and ranged from 5% and 18%.

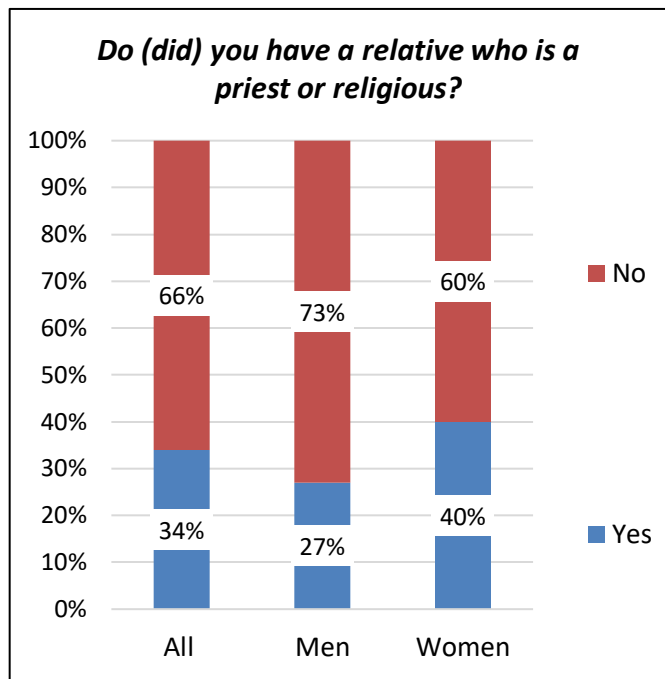
Six percent reports neither their mother nor their father was Catholic when they were a child. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 8%, and ranged from 5% and 14%.

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

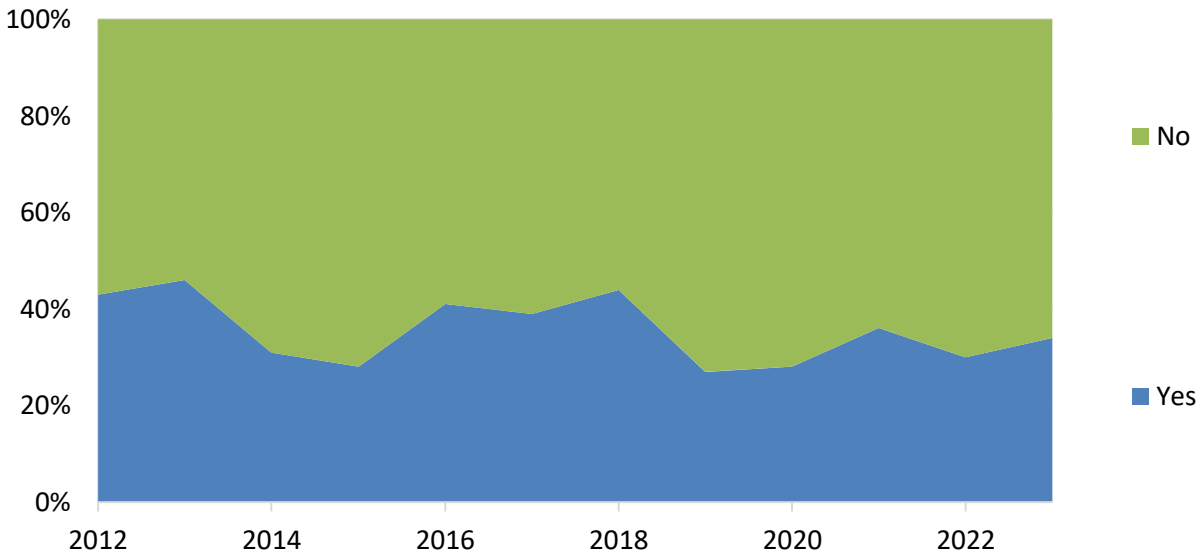
2012-2023



A third (34%) report having a relative who is a priest or a religious. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 36% and ranged between 27% and 46%.



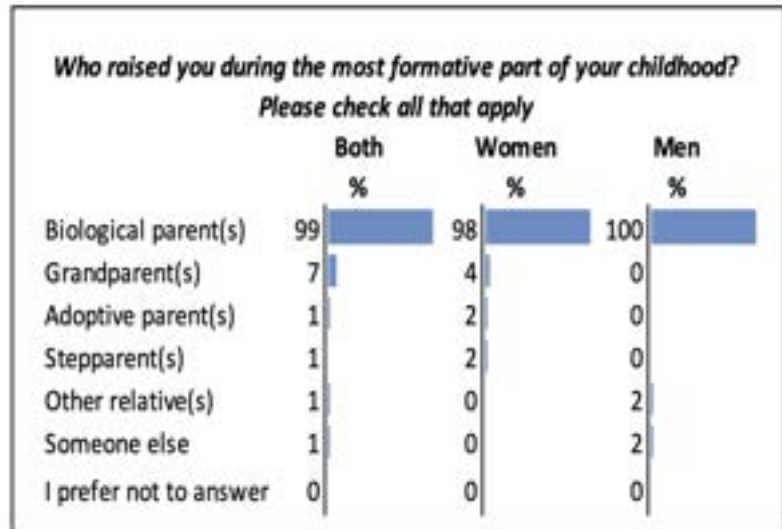
**Do (did) you have a relative who is a priest or religious?
2012-2023**



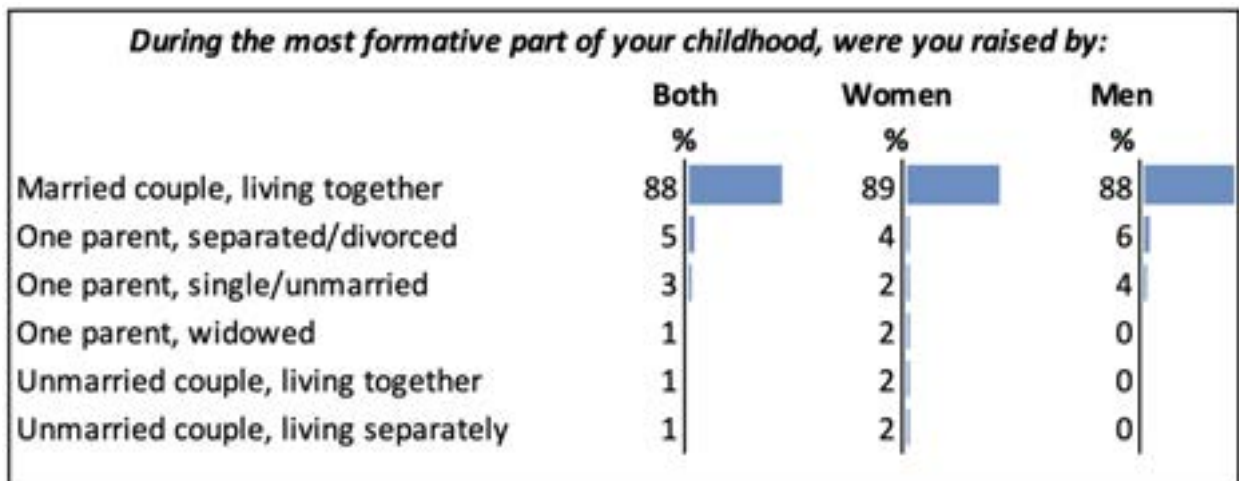
Parenting

Almost all (99%) respondents were raised by their biological parents during the most formative part of their childhood. Between 2021 and 2023, their share averaged 99% and ranged between 95% and 99%.

One in ten (10%) was raised by their grandparents during the most formative part of their childhood. Between 2021 and 2023, their share averaged 10% and ranged between 7% and 13%.



During the most formative part of their childhood, nearly nine in ten (88%) respondents were raised by a married couple, living together. Five percent were raised by one parent who was either separated or divorced. Three percent were raised by one parent, single/unmarried, an unmarried couple who lived together, or married couple living separately, or one parent either single or unmarried.



Siblings

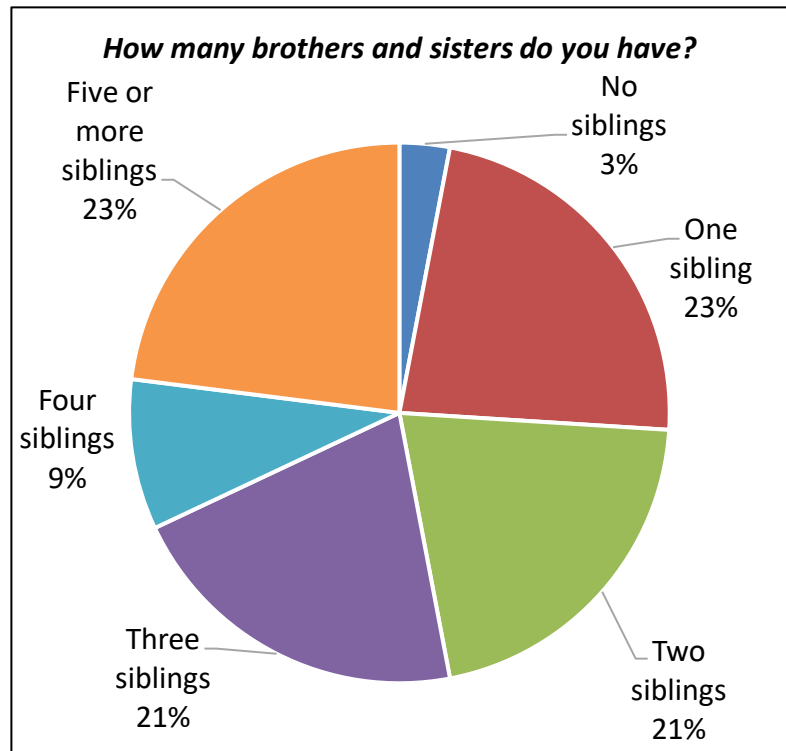
Almost all responding religious (97%) of the Profession Class of 2023 have at least one sibling.

Almost one in four 2023 respondents (23%) has one brother or sister. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 19% and ranged between 11% and 25%.

One in five (21%) reports having two siblings. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 21% and ranged between 15% and 26%.

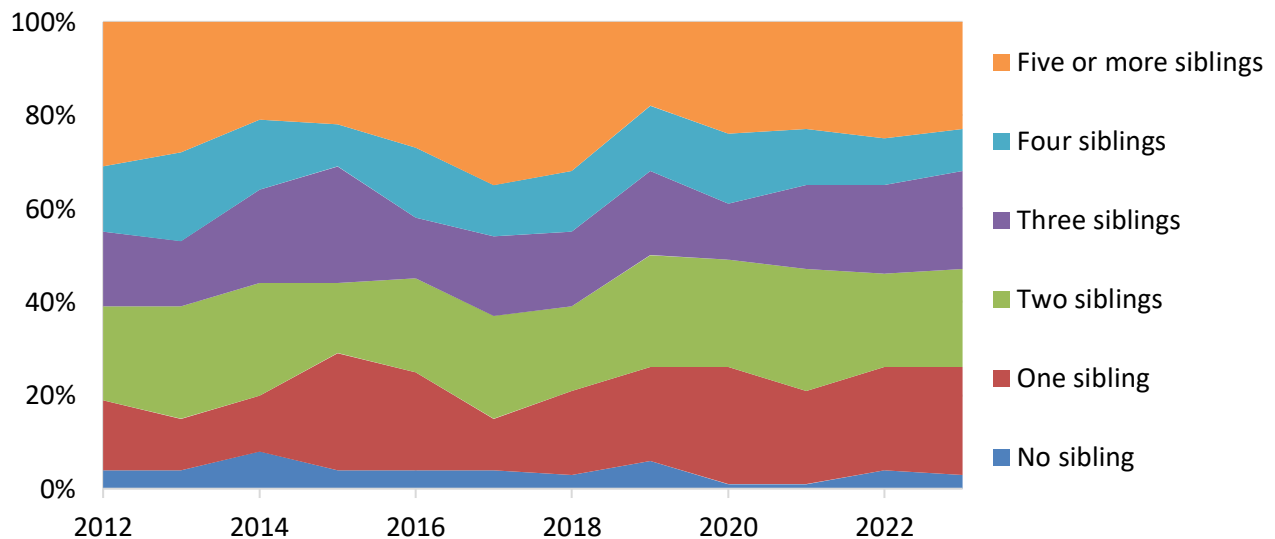
One in five (21%) reports having three siblings. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 17% and ranged between 12% and 25%.

One in ten (9%) reports having four siblings. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 13% and ranged between 9% and 19%.



Around a quarter (23%) have four or more siblings. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 26% and ranged between 18% and 35%.

How many brothers and sisters do you have?
Percentage of responses, 2012-2023

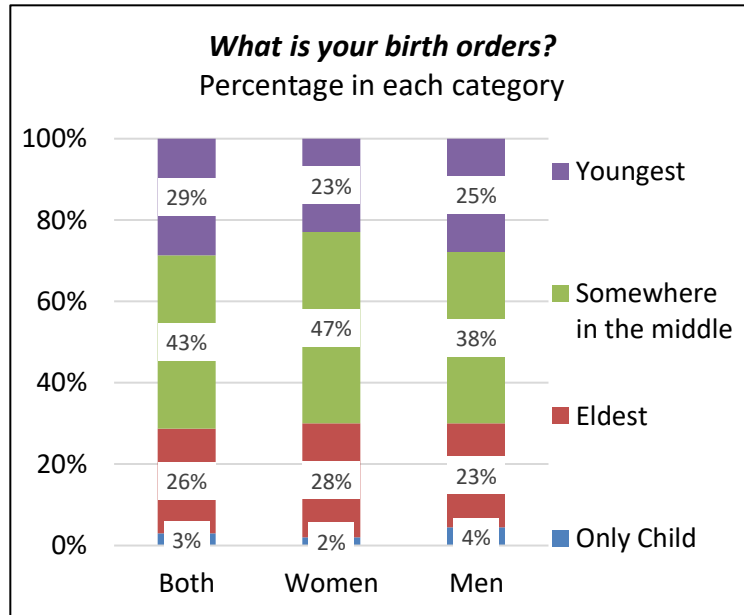


Birth Order

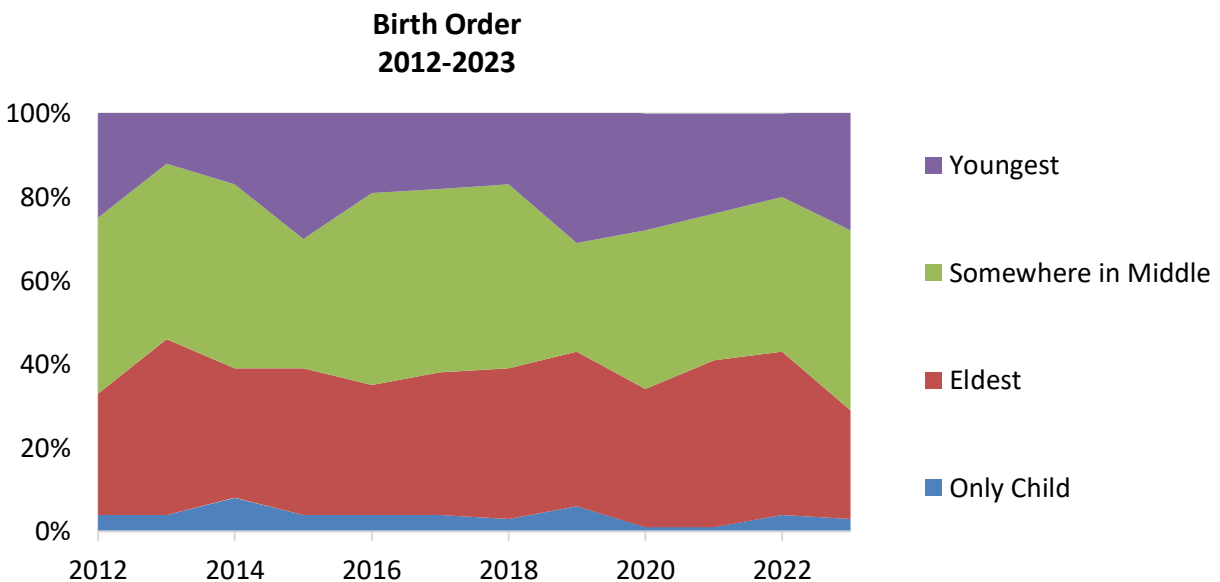
More than two in five 2023 respondents (43%) were born somewhere in the middle. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 39% and ranged between 26% and 46%.

Three in ten respondents (29%) are the youngest. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 25% and ranged between 17% and 33%.

A quarter of respondents are the eldest. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 34% and ranged between 26% and 42%.



Just 3% are the only child in his or her family. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 4% and ranged between 1% and 8%.

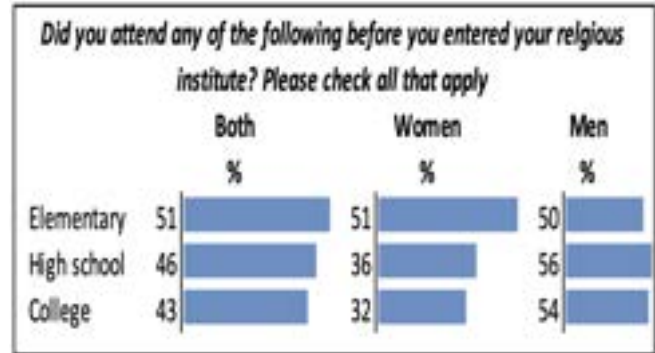


Part III: Educational Background

The educational background of the men and women religious is described in Part III.

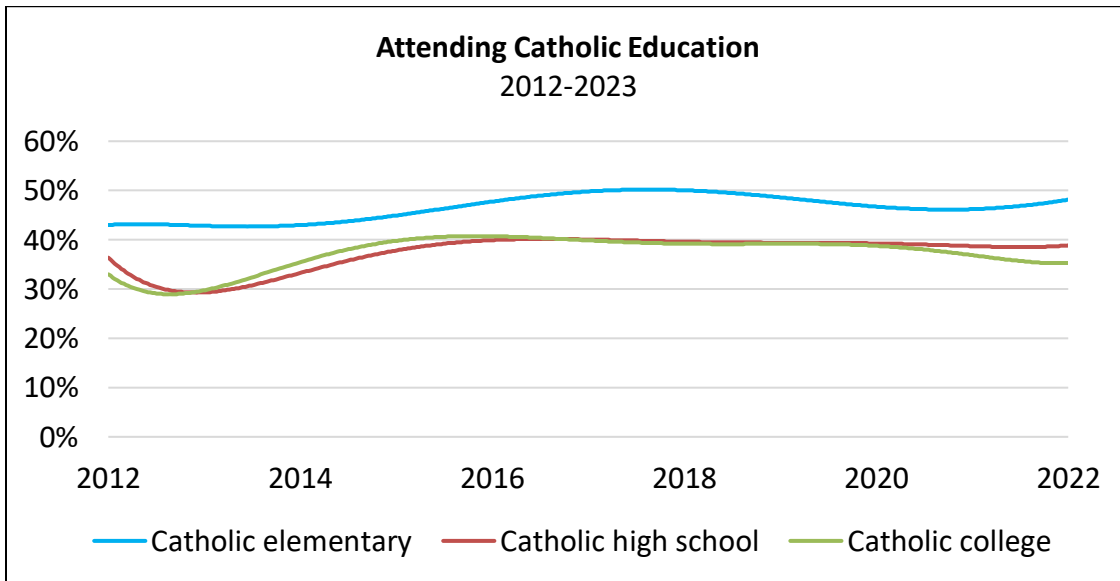
Catholic Education

Half (51%) of responding religious professing final vows in 2023 attended a Catholic elementary or middle school. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 47% and ranged between 42% and 51%.



Nearly a half (46%) attended a Catholic high school. Men are more likely than women to have attended a Catholic high school. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 38% and ranged between 31% and 46%.

Two in five (43%) attended a Catholic college or university. Men are more likely than women to attend Catholic colleges and universities. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 38% and ranged between 30% and 43%.



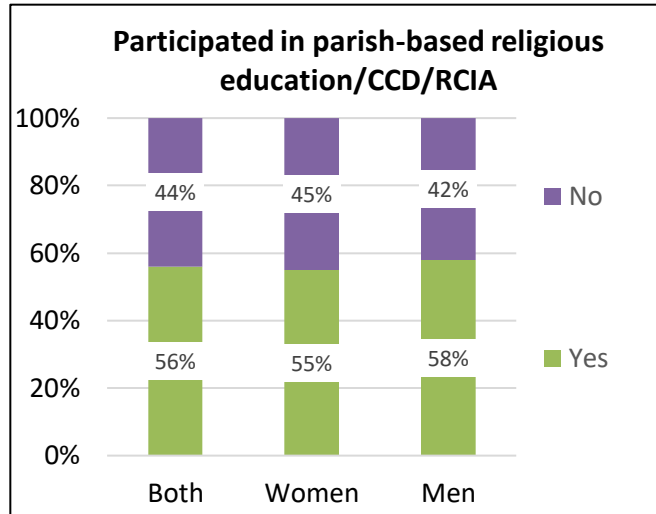
Members of the Profession Class of 2023 are more likely than other U.S. adult Catholics to have attended a Catholic elementary school. In a 2016 national poll conducted by CARA,¹ 16% of U.S. adult Catholics report having attended a Catholic elementary school compared to 51% of the members of the Profession Class of 2023. Responding perpetually professed religious of 2023 are also more likely than other U.S. adult Catholics to have attended a Catholic high school (46% among responding religious, compared to 8% of U.S. adult Catholics) and much more likely to have attended a Catholic college (43% of responding religious, compared to 5% of U.S. adult Catholics).

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

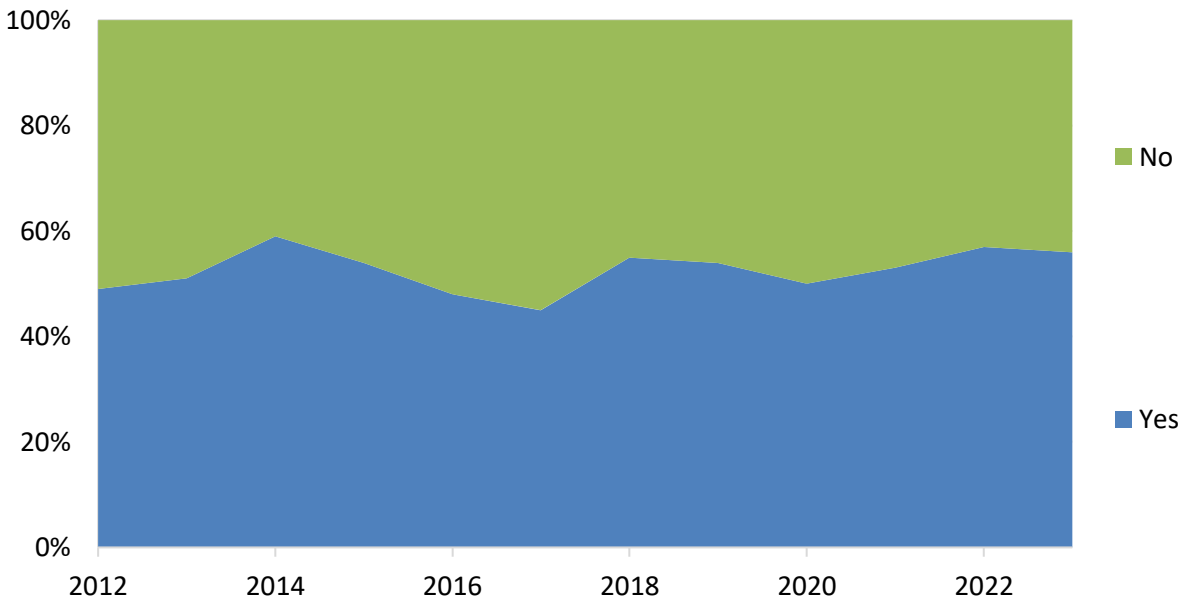
Catholic Religious Education

Nearly three in five respondents (57%) participated in a religious education program/CCD/RCIA in their parish. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 53% and ranged between 45% and 59%.

Among respondents who said they participated in a religious education program in their parish, 63% did not report attending a Catholic elementary school and 68% did not attend a Catholic high school.

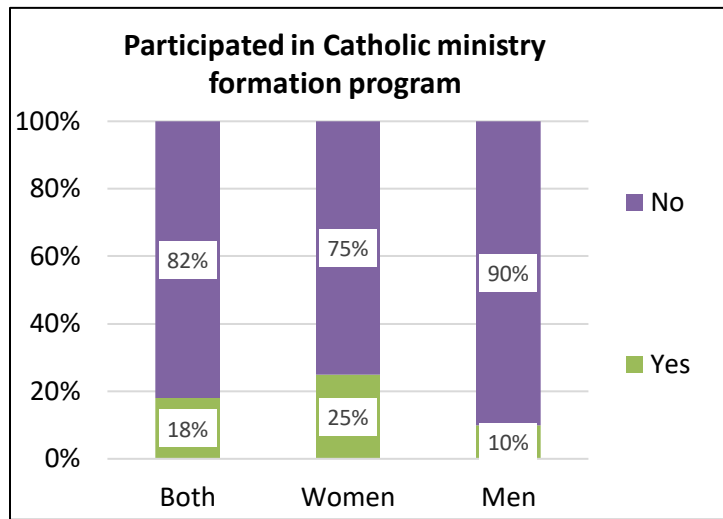


**Participated in parish-based religious education/CCD/RCIA
2012-2023**

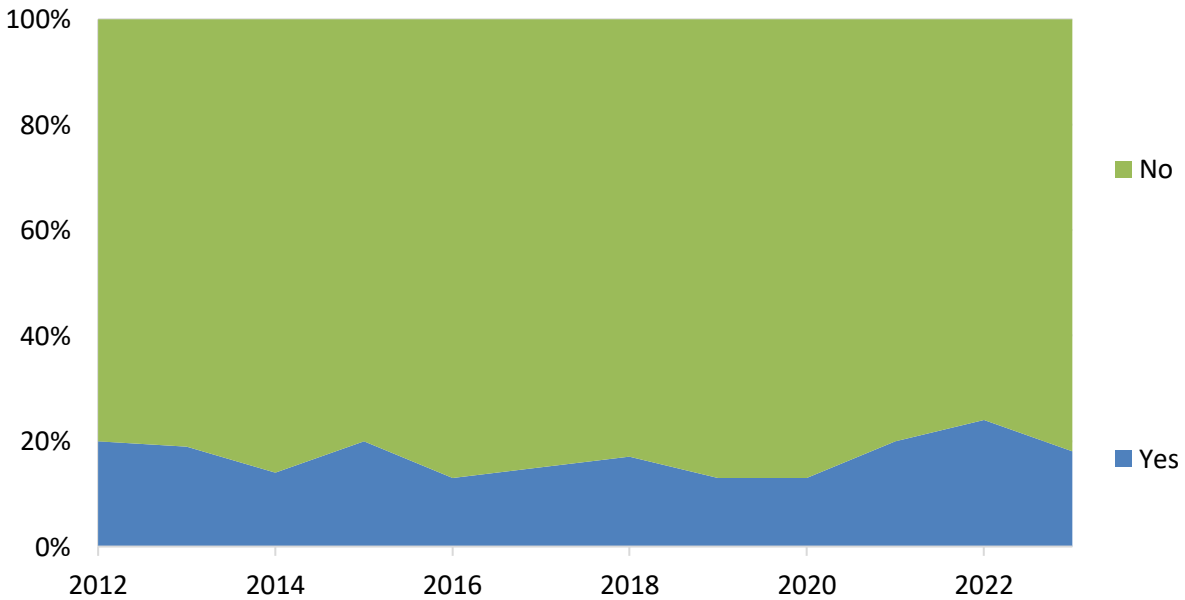


Almost two in ten (18%) responding women and men religious report that they participated in a Catholic ministry formation program before they entered their religious institute.

Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 17% and ranged between 13% and 24%.



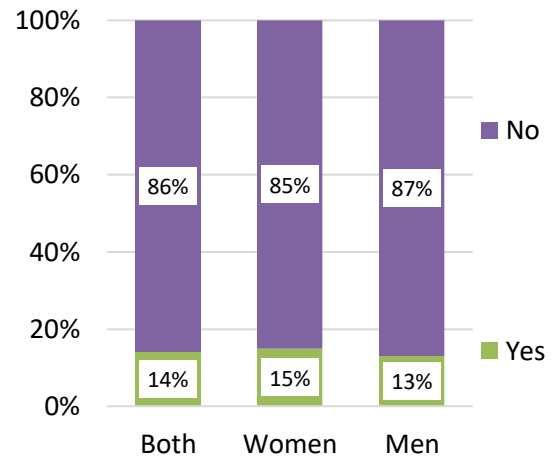
**Participated in Catholic ministry formation program
2012-2023**



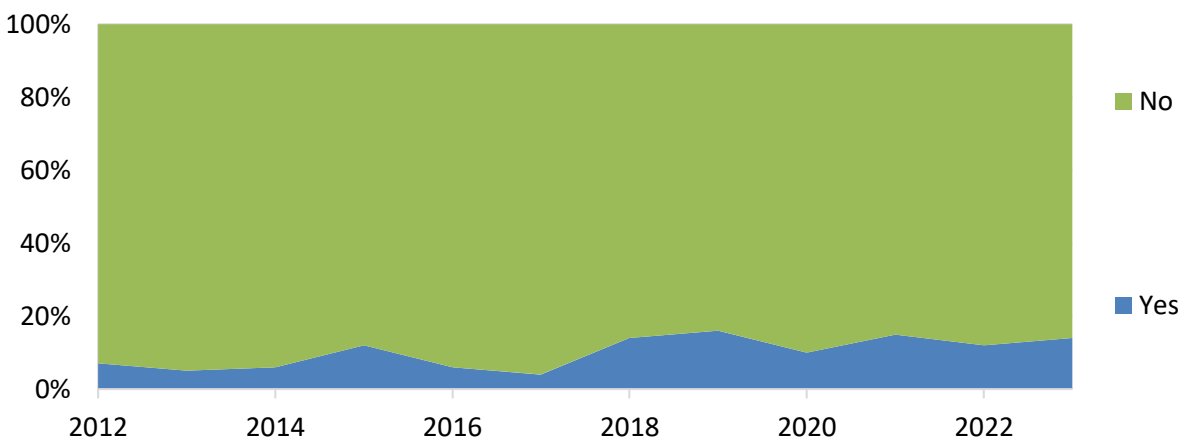
Home Schooling

One in six (14%) responding religious reports being home schooled at some time in their educational background. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 10% and ranged between 4% and 16%.

Were you ever home schooled?



**Were you ever home schooled?
2012-2023**



Among those who were home schooled, the average length of time they were home schooled was nine years.

If you were home schooled, total number of years of home schooling?

Profession Class of 2023

	Both [year]	Women [years]	Men [years]
	%	%	%
Average	9	9	9
Mean	10	10	10
Range	2-12	4-12	2-12

Highest Education

The responding religious are highly educated. Eight in ten (82%) earned an undergraduate or graduate degree before entering their religious institute.

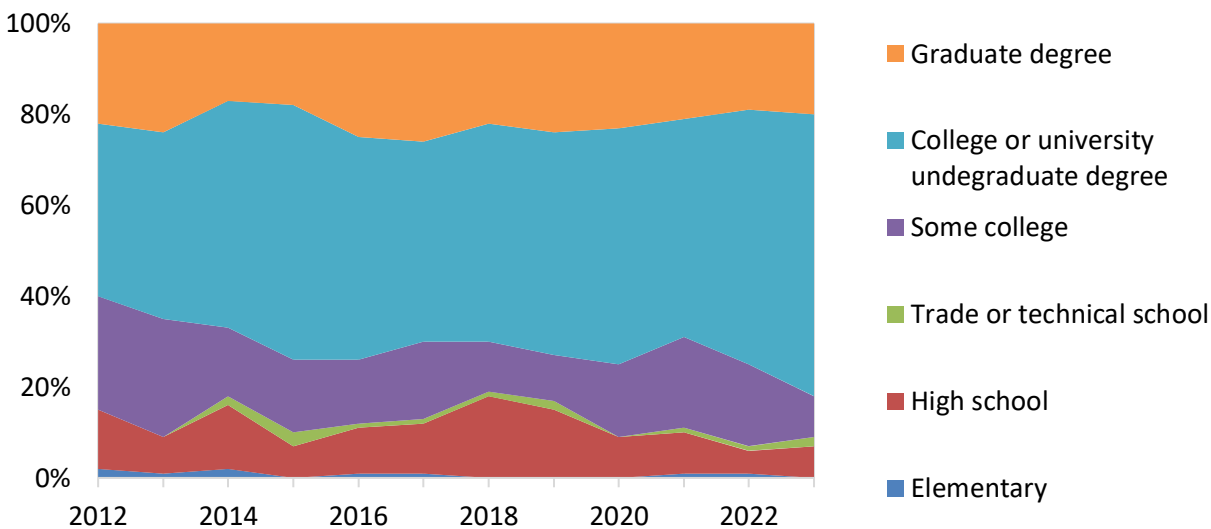
Six in ten respondents of the Profession Class of 2023 completed an undergraduate degree before entering. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 49% and ranged between 38% and 62%.

	Both %	Women %	Men %
High school	7	6	8
Trade or technical school	2	2	2
Some college, no degree	9	11	6
Undergraduate degree	62	64	60
Graduate degree	20	17	23

One in five (20%) had a graduate degree before entering their religious institute. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 20% and ranged between 17% and 26%.

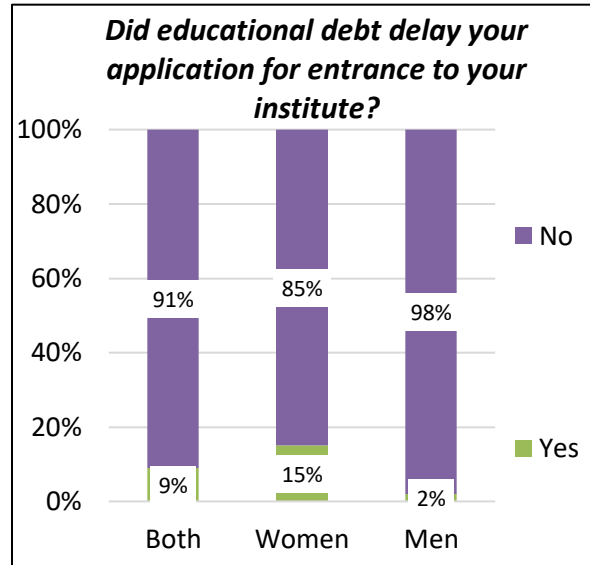
About one in 20 (7%) religious of the Profession Class of 2023 completed only high school or less before entering the religious institute. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 11% and ranged between 5% and 18%.

**What is the highest level of education you completed before entering your religious institute?
2012-2023**

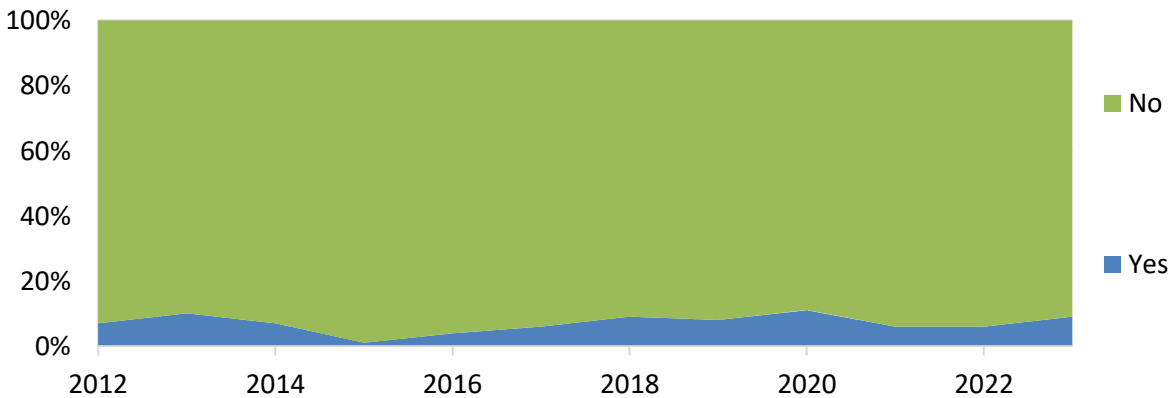


Educational Debt

One in ten responding religious (9%) reports that educational debt delayed their application for entrance to the religious institute. While eight sisters report having educational debt, only one religious brother or priest reports the same. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 7% and ranged between 1% and 11%.



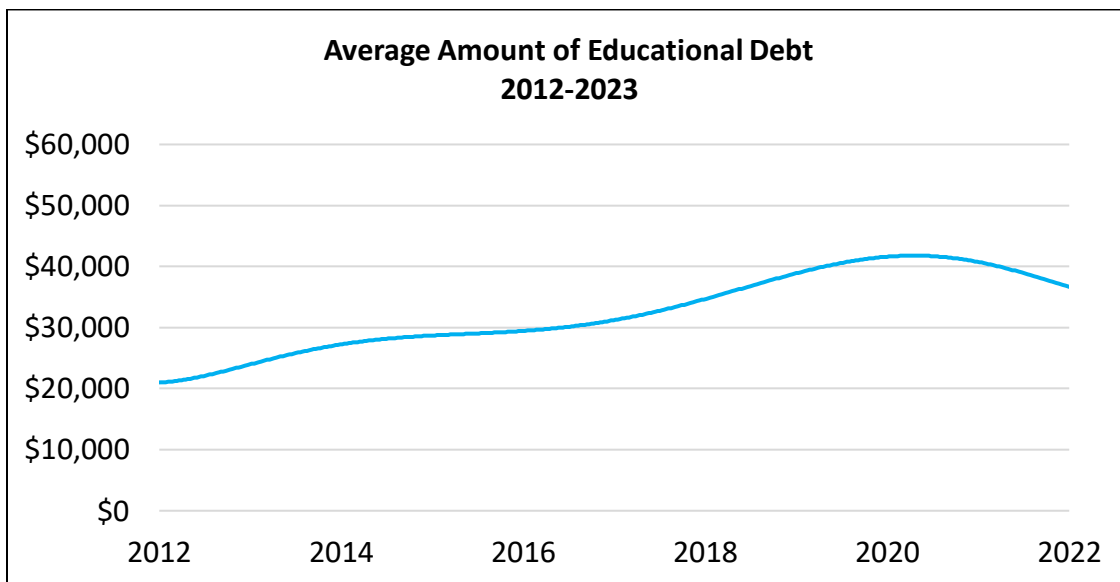
**Did educational debt delay your application for entrance to your institute?
2012-2023**



Those responding professed members who had educational debt had, on average, \$36,667 of educational debt at the time of making perpetual profession (half had between \$5,000 and \$40,000 and the other half between \$40,000 and \$60,000).

Impact of Educational Debt on Entrance to Religious Life			
	Both	Women	Men
Average amount of debt	\$36,667	\$40,000	\$10,000
Median amount of debt	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$10,000
Range	\$5000-\$60,000	\$5000-\$60,000	\$10,000

Since 2012, the average amount of debt was \$32,513 and ranged between \$15,750 and \$50,000.



Those responding professed members who had educational debt had reported receiving assistance from family members (3 members), from friends/co-workers (2 members), from Mater Ecclesiae Fund for Vocations (2 members), and from the Laboure Society (2 members) in paying down their debt.

Part IV: Work and Ministry Experience Before Entering

In Part IV, the work and ministry experiences of the women and men religious are described.

Work Experience

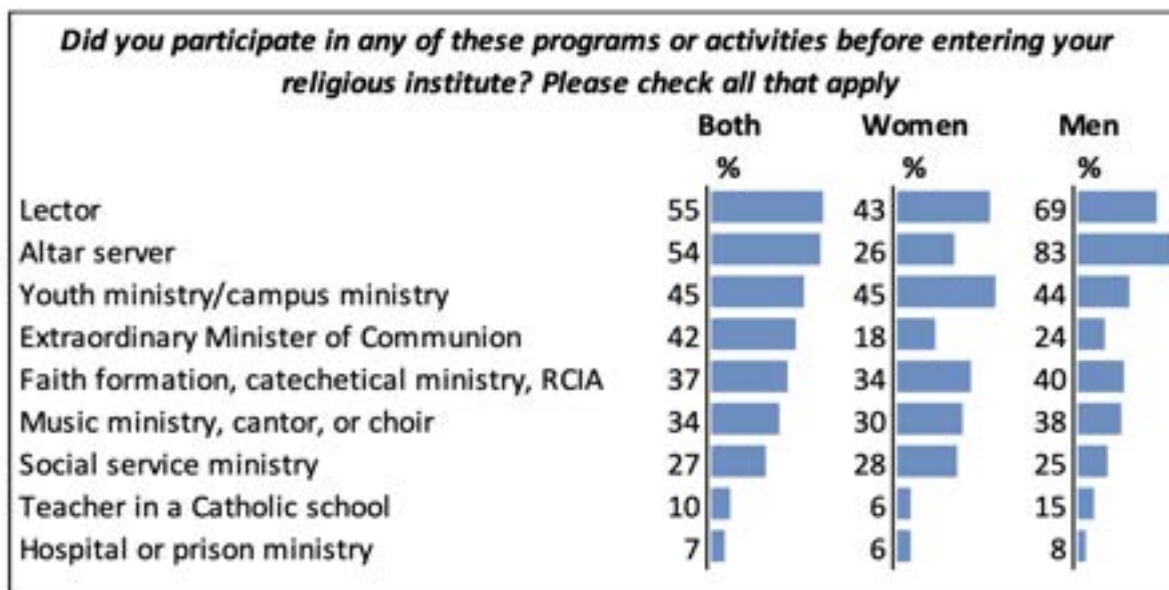
Four in five (82%) of responding religious report some type of work experience prior to entering their religious institute. More than a half (55%) were employed full-time and nearly three in ten (27%) were employed part-time before entering their religious institute.

Prior Work Experience			
<i>Percentage in each category</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
Business/Occupational	40	38	43
Education/Academic	35	31	40
Health care	8	15	0
Church/pastoral ministry	6	8	3
Others	11	8	14

Two in five responding religious (40%) report that they were in some form of business, or an occupation or trade, or technology prior to entering their religious institute. A third had been employed in education (35%). Nearly one in ten (8%) had been employed in a health care field. One in 20 (6%) was employed in a Church or pastoral ministry.

Women are more likely than men religious to work in health care (15% compared with 0% of men religious).

Ministry Experience



More than nine in ten responding religious (93%) served in one or more specified ministries before entering their religious institute, either in a paid ministry position or as a volunteer.

Half served as lectors (55%). They represented 43% of women religious and 69% of men religious. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 48% and ranged between 42% and 55%.

Half served as altar server (54%). They represented 26% of women religious and 83% of men religious. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 40% and ranged between 21% and 54%.

Nearly half served as youth minister/campus minister (45%). Between 2016 and 2023, their share averaged 27% and ranged between 29% and 49% (data available since 2016).

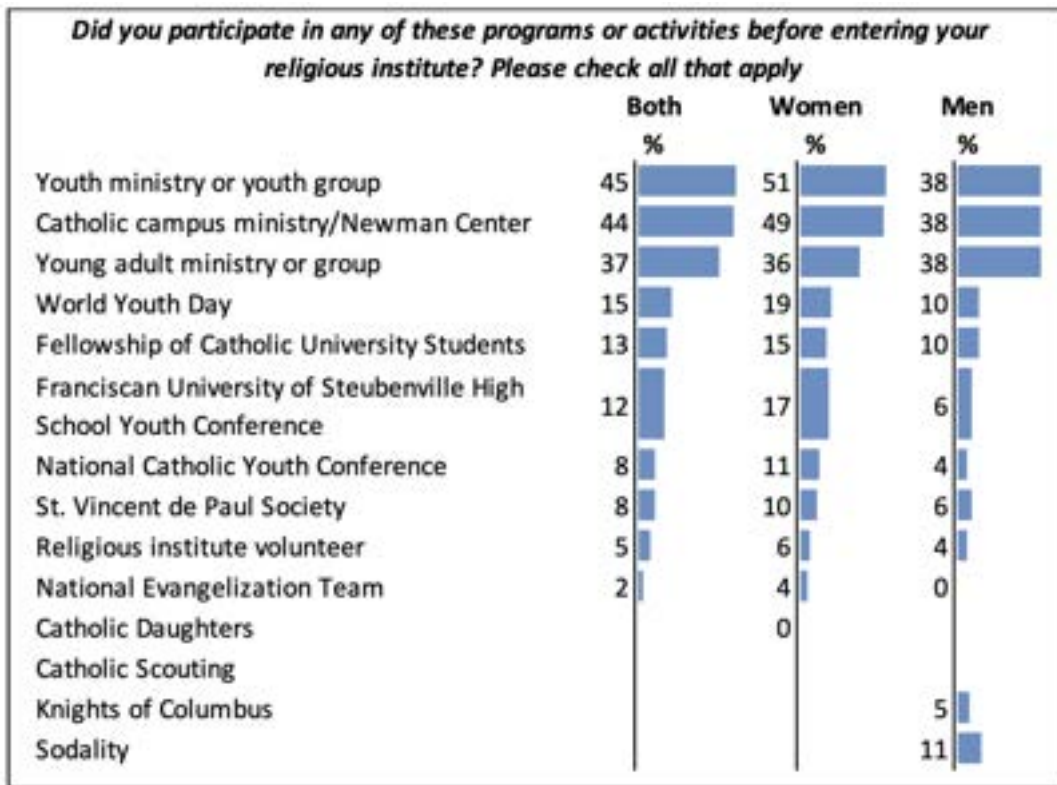
Two in five served as an Extraordinary Minister of Communion (42%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 41% and ranged between 32% and 52%.

Nearly two in five served in faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA (37%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 43% and ranged between 36% and 54%.

A third served in music ministry, cantor, or choir (34%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 37% and ranged between 39% and 49%.

A quarter served social service ministry (e.g., Catholic Charities program, other community service) (27%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 28% and ranged between 20% and 41%.

One in ten (10%) served as a teacher in a Catholic school. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 13% and ranged between 9% and 18%.



Three in four (74%) participated in one or more religious programs or activities before entering their religious institute, with the most common ministry being the youth ministry or youth group (45%), with nearly half participating in this ministry.

More than two in five respondents (44%) participated in Catholic campus ministry/Newman Center. Women are more likely than men to have participated in this ministry.

A third (35%) participated in a young adult ministry or group before entering religious life.

At least one in ten participated in World Youth Day (15%), Fellowship of Catholic University Students (13%), and Franciscan University of Steubenville High School Youth Conference (12%) prior to entering their religious institute.

Nearly one in ten participated in a National Catholic Youth Conference (8%) and in St. Vincent de Paul Society (8%).

Around one in 20 participated in a religious institute voluntary program (5%). Just 2% participated in National Evangelization Team.

Part V: Vocational Discernment

Part V summarizes the women and men religious' experiences during their vocational discernment period.

Private Prayer Practices and Prayer Groups



Almost all responding religious of the Profession Class of 2023 (96%) participated in one or more of these prayer practices or groups on a regular basis prior to entering their religious institute.

Eucharistic Adoration is the most common type of formative prayer experience. Four in five did Eucharistic Adoration (82%) on a regular basis before entering their religious institute. Women are more likely than men to report doing Eucharistic Adoration before entering religious life (87% compared to 75% of men). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 73% and ranged between 61% and 86%.

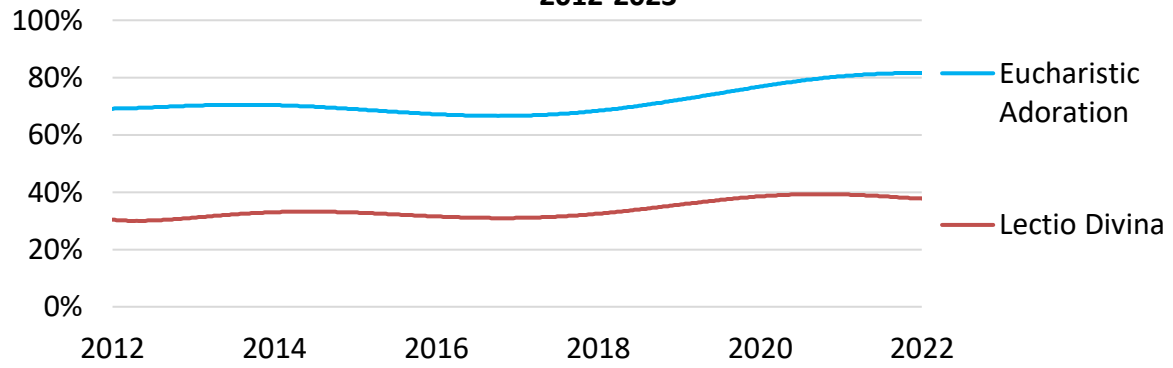
Seven in ten respondents participated in rosaries (72%) on a regular basis before joining their religious institute. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 68% and ranged between 59% and 72%.

About a half (48%) regularly participated in a faith-sharing group or a Bible study group. Women are more likely than men to participate in this practice (59% compared with 35% of men). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 48% and ranged between 44% and 55%.

Two in five (39%) regularly participated in the *Lectio Divina* prayer practice prior to entering their religious institute. This is an ancient prayer practice from the Order of St. Benedict. Half of women (49%) practiced this practice, compared to 27% of men. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 34% and ranged between 28% and 42%.

Did you participate in any of these prayer practices or groups on a regular basis before entering your religious institute?

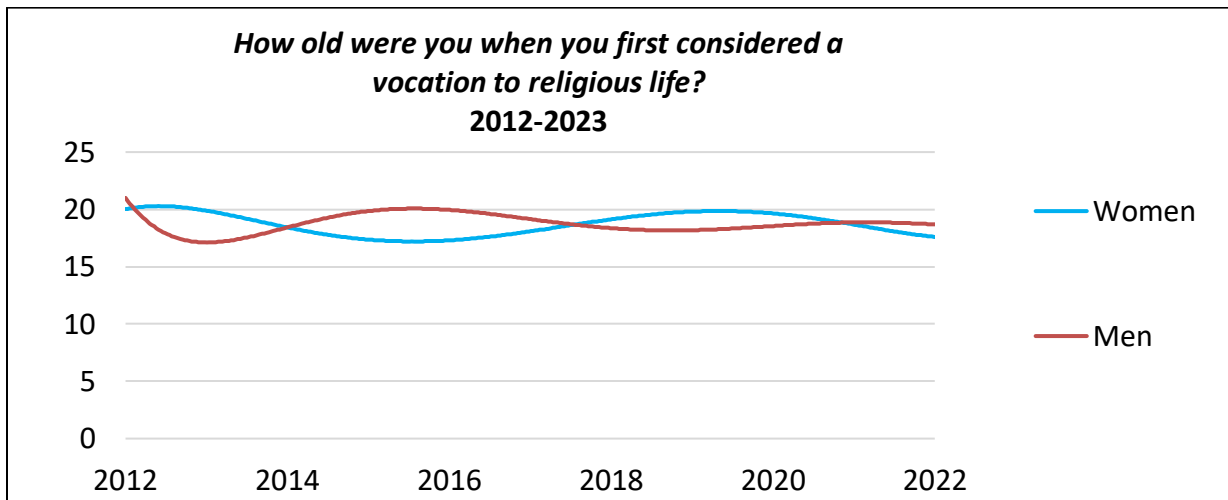
2012-2023



Age When First Considered a Vocation to Religious Life

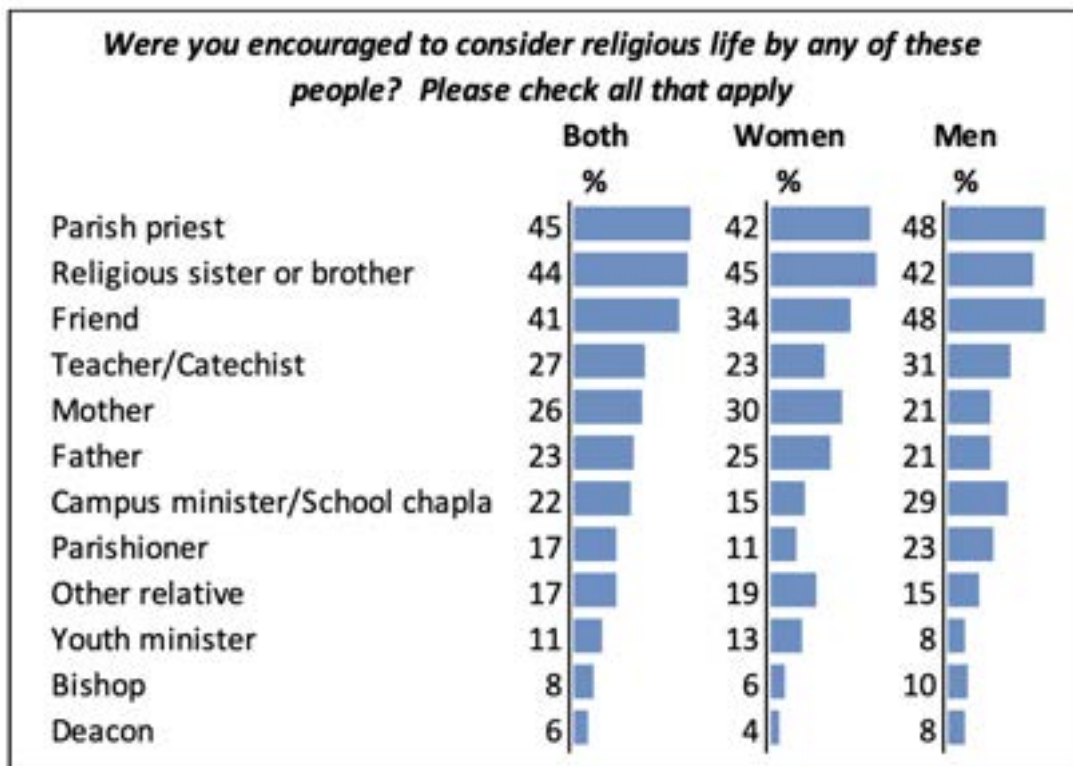
On average, responding religious report being 18 years old when they first considered a vocation to religious life, with half being 18 or younger when they first considered a vocation. Since 2012, the average age was 19 and ranged between 18 and 20.

	Age		
	Both [years]	Women [years]	Men [years]
Mean	18	18	19
Median	18	17	18
Range	3-54	5-53	3-54



Encouragement to Consider a Vocation

More than eight in ten (82%) responding religious report that someone encouraged them to consider a vocation to religious life.



More than two in five report being encouraged by a parish priest (45%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 45% and ranged between 39% and 53%.

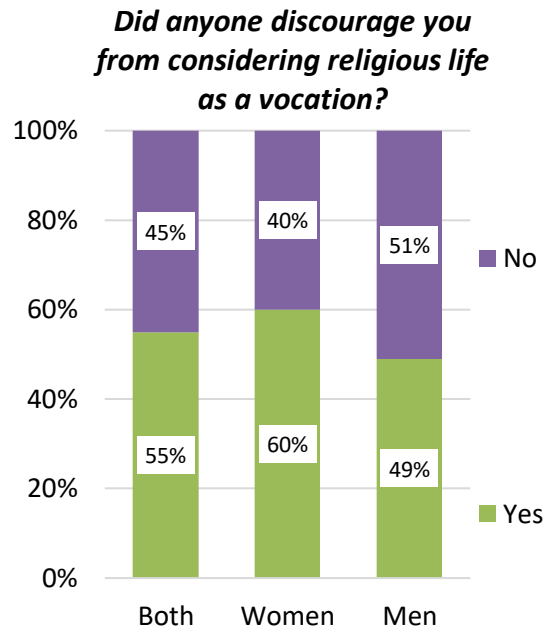
Two in five reported being encouraged by a friend (41%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 42% and ranged between 39% and 45%.

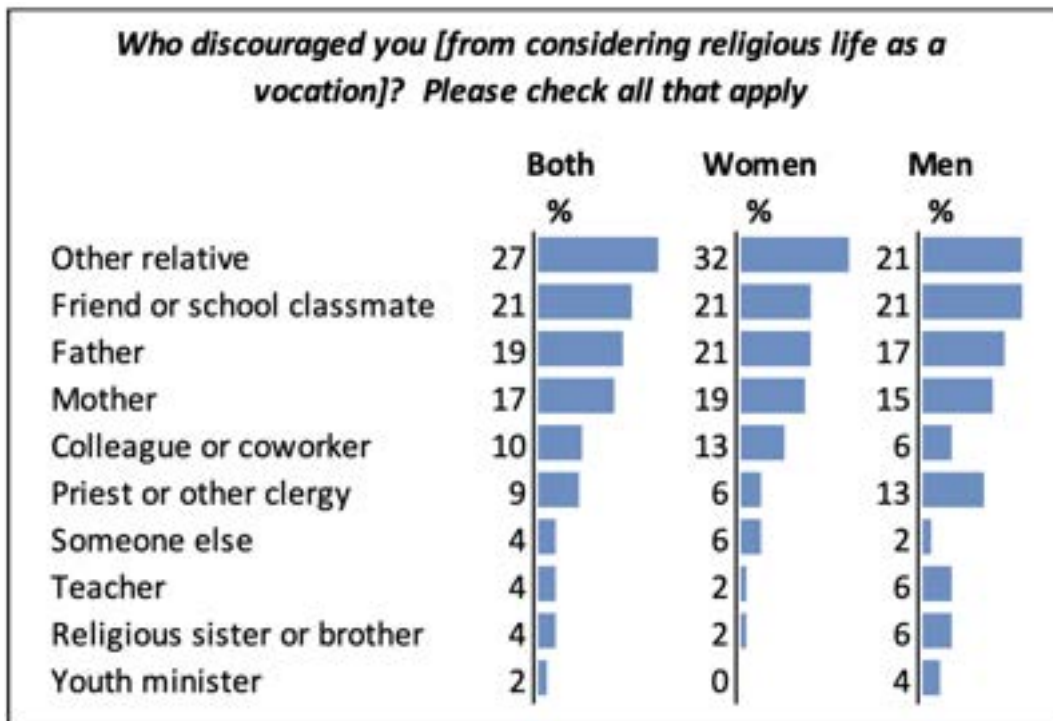
A quarter was encouraged to consider a vocation to religious life by their mother (26%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 26% and ranged between 16% and 34%.

Nearly one in five reported being encouraged to consider a vocation to religious life by a parishioner (17%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 22% and ranged between 17% and 28%.

Discouragement from Considering a Vocation

More than half (55%) 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 (60% compared with 49% of men religious).





Those who reported being discouraged from considering religious life as a vocation are most likely to report that they were discouraged by other relative (27%) other than their parents. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 35% and ranged between 26% and 53%.

One in five reported being discouraged from considering religious life as a vocation by their friend or school classmate (21%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 31% and ranged between 21% and 52%.

One in five reported being discouraged from considering religious life as a vocation by their father (19%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 23% and ranged between 15% and 43%.

One in ten reported being discouraged from considering religious life as a vocation by their colleague or coworker (9%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 12% and ranged between 5% and 21%.

One in ten reported being discouraged from considering religious life as a vocation by a priest or other clergy (9%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 7% and ranged between 3% and 12%.

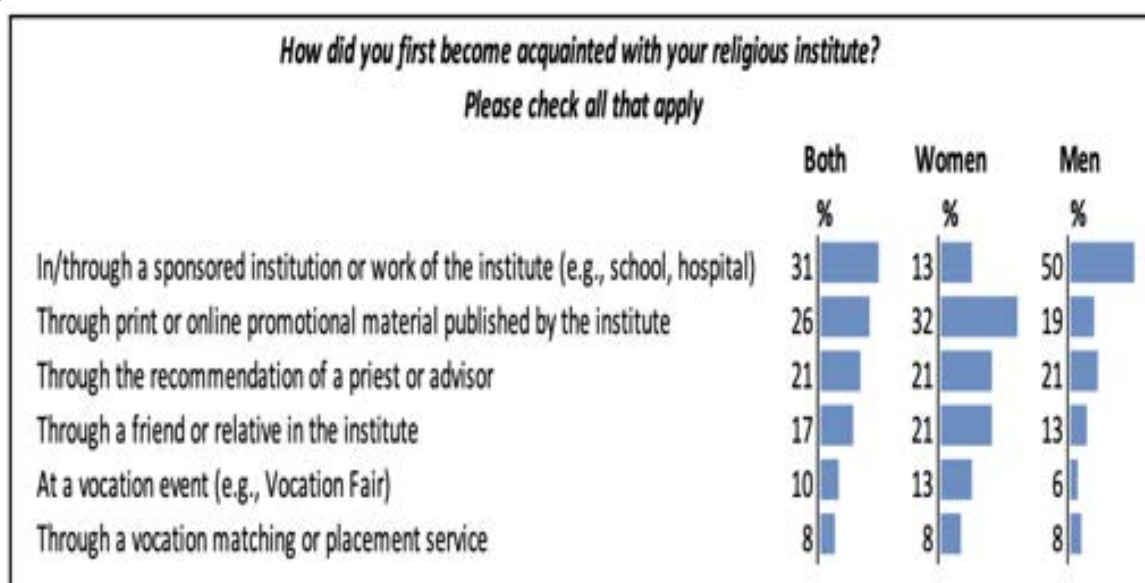
Initial Acquaintance with the Religious Institute

On average, responding religious reported that they knew the members of their religious institute four years before they entered. Since 2012, the average length was four years.

How many years did you know the members of your religious institute before entering?

	Both [years]	Women [years]	Men [years]
Mean	4	4	5
Median	3	3	4
Range	0-28	0-21	0-28

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



Three in ten (31%) report being first acquainted with their institute in/through a sponsored institution or work of the institute (e.g., school, hospital). Men are more likely than women to have become acquainted through this way (50% compared with 13% of women). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 22% and ranged between 15% and 31%.

A quarter report being first acquainted with their institute through print or online promotional material published by the institute (26%). Women are more likely than men to have become acquainted through this way (32% compared with 19% of men). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 26% and ranged between 19% and 36%.

One in five indicates that they first became acquainted with their institute through the recommendation of a priest or advisor (21%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 21% and ranged between 16% and 28%.

One in five indicate that they first became acquainted with their institute through a friend or relative in the institute (17%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 15% and ranged between 9% and 22%.

About one in ten first became acquainted with their institute at a vocation event (e.g., Vocation Fair) (10%). Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 15% and ranged between 5% and 13%.

More than a third (35%) said they first became acquainted with their religious institute through some other means. Some of those “other” responses included:

- A friend also discerning
- A Nuns Life Ministry
- A seminarian talking about them
- A writer who was a monk
- An Alumni of Saint Anselm College, and previously my high school teacher, brought me to prayer with the monks
- At a Eucharist-centered college retreat where one of them spoke
- Eucharistic Congress
- Facebook - I saw my college friend had joined a religious institute!
- General Knowledge
- Google
- Google search
- I first met our sisters on a one-day nun run. Also, my father works with some of our sisters, so I met them through his work parties.
- Institute website
- March for Life in Washington DC
- March for Life in Washington, DC
- My family knew them
- New staff training for FOCUS, and working with religious institute for spring break mission trip.
- Our community's website
- Pro-life group
- The Sisters lived in my neighborhood
- They were my parish's priests
- Through a friend who was not part of the Order
- Through a young adult group
- through friends
- Through independently learning about my Order's spiritual father
- through one of my family members
- Through some friends who knew and talked about our sisters.
- Vicar of religious life gave me a booklet with information on the different religious orders in the Diocese of Orange.
- Website of my Dominican Province
- Were the priests at a church I occasionally attended.
- World Youth Day
- Young Women's Retreat hosted by the religious institute
- Youth Events

Participating in Vocation/Discernment Programs and Experiences

More than nine in ten (94%) had participated in at least one of these programs or experiences shown in the table below 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. Nearly four in five (77%) report participating in this program before they entered their religious institute. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 66% and ranged between 56% and 77%.

Vocation/Discernment Programs and Experiences*			
<i>Percentage checking each response</i>			
	Both	Women	Men
	%	%	%
“Come and See” experience	77	77	77
Vocation retreat	49	53	44
Live-in experience	21	26	15
“Andrew Dinner”	—	**	4
“Nun Run”	—	11	***
Other	8	8	8

*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 (49%) participated in a vocation retreat before entering their religious institute. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 50% and ranged between 45% and 59%.

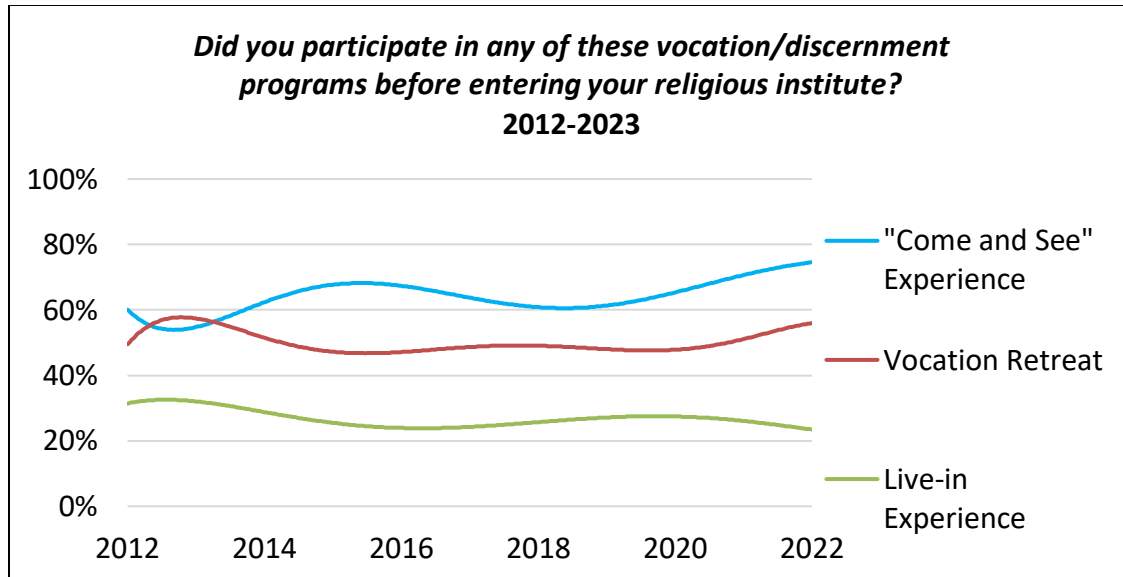
One in five (21%) participated in some sort of live-in experience with their religious institute before entering. Between 2012 and 2023, their share averaged 26% and ranged between 17% and 34%.

One in ten (11%) report participating in a “Nun Run” (asked only of women), and 4% 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:

- Casa Balthasar
- Frequent visits to the Order house
- I came on a private weekend retreat where I met several times with the vocation directress.

- Unique missionary placement where I lived with another religious community for a year yet worked as a volunteer in their apostolate.
- Vocation Visits
- Volunteer/Coworker Formation Day
- Weekend volunteer program



Appendix: Questionnaire with Response Frequencies



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



Profession Class of 2023 National Survey

This survey will help us to understand the characteristics of the women professing perpetual vows in religious life in 2023. 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.**

1. Name of your religious institute: _____

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

3. Your year of birth: _____

4. Are you: 48 Male 52 Female

5. Your country of birth: 76 USA 24 Others

_____ 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):

- 67 Caucasian/European American/white
- 7 African/African American/black
- 9 Hispanic/Latina
- 12 Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian/Middle Eastern
- 0 Native American/Alaska Native
- 2 Mixed race
- 3 Other: _____

7. How long have you been a Catholic?

- 90 Baptized Catholic as an infant (“cradle Catholic”)
- 10 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 apply.**

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 99 Biological parent(s) | 1 Other relative(s) |
| 1 Step parent | 0 Someone else |
| 0 Adoptive parent(s) | 0 I prefer not to answer |
| 7 Grandparent(s) | |

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

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 88 Married couple, living together | 5 One parent, separated/divorced |
| 1 Married couple, living separately | 3 One parent, single/unmarried |
| 0 Unmarried couple, living separately | 1 Something else |
| 1 Unmarried couple, living together | 0 I prefer not to answer |
| 1 One parent, widowed | |

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

- | | |
|--|--|
| 86 Both parents Catholic | 2 Father Catholic, mother non-Catholic |
| 6 Mother Catholic, father non-Catholic | 6 Neither parent was Catholic |

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

11. What is your birth order?

- | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|----------------------------|
| 3 Only child | 26 Eldest | 29 Youngest | 43 Somewhere in the middle |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|----------------------------|

12. Do (did) you have a relative who is a priest or a religious? 34 Yes 66 No

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

- | | |
|---|---|
| 56 Parish-based religious education/ CCD/RCIA | 43 Catholic college or university |
| 51 Catholic elementary or middle school | 18 Catholic ministry formation programs |
| 46 Catholic high school | |

14. Were you ever home schooled? 14 Yes 86 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?

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 0 Elementary school (K-8) | 9 Some college, but not a Bachelor's degree |
| 7 High school | 62 College or university undergraduate degree |
| 2 Trade or technical school | 20 Graduate degree |

16. Did educational debt delay your application for entrance to your institute? 9 Yes 91 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**

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 3 Family members | 0 Serra Fund for Vocations |
| 0 Parish | 2 Mater Ecclesiae Fund for Vocations |
| 0 Religious community | 1 Knights of Columbus Fund for Vocations |
| 2 Friends/co-workers | 0 National Fund for Catholic Religious Vocations |
| 2 The Labouré Society | 1 Other: _____ |

17. Were you employed before entering your religious institute?

- | | | |
|-------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 18 No | 27 Yes, part-time | 55 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?

- | | | | |
|-------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 18 No | 58 Yes, as a volunteer | 14 Yes, part-time | 10 Yes, full-time |
|-------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|

19. Did you serve in any of these **ministries** before entering your religious institute? **Please check all that apply**
- | | |
|---|--|
| 54 Altar server | 10 Teacher in a Catholic school |
| 42 Extraordinary Minister of Communion | 7 Hospital or prison ministry |
| 55 Lector | 27 Social service ministry (e.g., Catholic Charities program, other community service) |
| 34 Music ministry, cantor, choir | 45 Youth ministry or Campus ministry |
| 37 Faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA | |
20. Did you participate in any of these **programs or activities** before entering your religious institute? **Please check all that apply**
- | | |
|---|---|
| 44 Catholic campus ministry/Newman Center | 5 Religious institute volunteer (e.g., Mercy Volunteer Corps or Jesuit Volunteer Corps) |
| 0 Catholic Daughters (if female) | 0 Sodality (if female) |
| 5 Catholic Scouting (if male) | 8 St. Vincent de Paul Society |
| 13 Fellowship of Catholic University Students | 15 World Youth Day |
| 12 Franciscan University of Steubenville High School Youth Conference | 37 Young adult ministry or group |
| 11 Knights of Columbus (if male) | 45 Youth ministry or youth group |
| 8 National Catholic Youth Conference | |
| 2 National Evangelization Team (NET) | |
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**
- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 81 Eucharistic Adoration | 39 Lectio Divina |
| 48 Faith-sharing group/Bible study | 69 Spiritual direction |
| 72 Rosary | 32 Liturgy of the Hours |
| 72 Retreats | |
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**
- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 26 Mother | 45 Parish Priest | 41 Friend |
| 17 Parishioner | 17 Other relative | 22 Campus Minister or School Chaplain |
| 8 Bishop | 11 Youth Minister | 6 Deacon |
| 23 Father | 44 Religious sister or brother | |
| 27 Teacher/Catechist | | |
24. Did anyone discourage you from considering religious life as a vocation? 55 Yes 45 No
- 24a. If "Yes" who discouraged you. **Please check all that apply**
- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 17 Mother | 10 Colleague or coworker |
| 19 Father | 4 Religious sister or brother |
| 27 Other relative | 2 Youth minister |
| 21 Friend or school classmate | 4 Teacher |
| 9 Priest or other clergy | 4 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**
- | |
|---|
| 31 In/through a sponsored institution or work of the institute (e.g., school, hospital) |
| 9 Through working with a Brother/Sister from the institute |

- 17 Through a friend or relative in the institute
- 21 Through the recommendation of a priest or advisor
- 26 Through print or online promotional material published by the institute
- 8 Through a vocation matching or placement service
- 10 At a vocation event (e.g., Vocation Fair)
- 35 Other: _____

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

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 2 "Andrew Dinner" (if male) | 21 Live-in experience |
| 6 "Nun Run" (if female) | 49 Vocation retreat |
| 77 "Come and See" experience | 8 Other: _____ |

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 2023 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 2023 webpage.

- Yes No I permit the USCCB to use my name, statement, and photograph on the Profession Class of 2023 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 Jorge Torres, Executive Director
 USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations

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