

March 2021

**Women and Men Entering Religious Life:
The Entrance Class of 2020**

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

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Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a national survey of women and men religious who formally entered a religious congregation, province, or monastery based in the United States during 2020. 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 all religious institutes that belong to either the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) or the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR), the two leadership conferences of women religious in the United States. CARA also contacted the major superiors of all religious institutes who belong to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM). Finally, CARA contacted the major superiors of 132 contemplative communities of women in the United States that were identified by the USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. Each major superior was asked to provide contact information for every person who entered the institute (for the first time, as a postulant or novice in institutes that do not have postulancy) in the United States since January 1, 2020.

After repeated follow-ups, CARA received a response from 549 of 747 major superiors, for an overall response rate of 73% among religious institutes. Two religious institutes were not interested in participating in the studies. In all, 85% of LCWR superiors, 77% of CMSM superiors, 69% of CMSWR superiors, and 47% of superiors of contemplative communities provided contact information for 309 members that entered religious life in 2020.

In November 2020, CARA emailed or mailed a survey to 309 identified entrants, asking them to complete an online survey or mail their completed paper survey to CARA. Among them, eight emails were bounced back. A total of 204 responded to the survey by February 1, 2020. This represents a response rate of 68% among 301 new entrants who were invited and eligible to participate in the survey.

Major Findings

Characteristics of Responding Institutes and Entrants

- Four in five (79%) responding religious institutes had no one entering religious life in 2020. Nine percent reported one entrant and 12% reported two or more.
- Half of respondents (49%) are women and another half (51%) are men. Among men, seven in ten expect to become priests and three in ten plan to become a perpetually professed brother.
- The average age of respondents of the Entrance Class of 2020 is 29. Half of the respondents are age 26 or younger.
- Responding postulants were born in 21 countries. About eight in ten (77%) respondents were born in the United States. Of those born outside the United States, the most commonly mentioned countries are Vietnam (N = 11), Mexico (N = 8), and the Philippines (N = 6). 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 12 years before entering religious life.
- Three-fifths of those who entered a religious institute report their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian/European American/white (63%). More than one in ten of the Entrance Class of 2020 identifies as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian (15%) and Hispanic/Latino(a) (12%). Three percent identify as African/African American/black. One person identifies as Native American or American Indian. Seven percent identify as mixed or some other race or ethnicity.
- Nine in ten respondents (91%) have been Catholic since birth. Four in five (80%) come from families in which both parents are Catholic. Almost all respondents of the Entrance Class of 2020 (97%) have at least one sibling and the most common number of siblings is one or two.
- Half of respondents (51%) say that it was easy for them to start a conversation with their family about their vocation. Men are more likely than women to say that starting a discussion with their family was easy for them.
- Two-thirds (66%) report that they got to know a priest or a religious brother or sister who was not a family member while they were growing up. Three in ten (31%) have a relative who is a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun.

- The responding members of the Entrance Class of 2020 were highly educated before entering. More than half reported having earned a bachelor's degree and about a quarter (23%) earned a graduate degree before entering their religious institute.
- Members of the Entrance Class of 2020 are more likely than other U.S. Catholics to have attended a Catholic high school (38% compared to 8%). In addition, entrants are more likely than other U.S. Catholics to have attended a Catholic college/university (38% compared to 5%).
- Many respondents were active in parish life as well as other religious programs or activities before entering their religious institute. Almost all respondents (97%) participated in at least one parish liturgical ministry before entering religious life.
- Seven in ten respondents (74%) participated in retreats. More than half (55%) participated in various types of voluntary work in a parish or other setting. Half participated in campus ministry during college. Four in ten participated in a parish youth group, Life Teen, or campus ministry during their high school years, or a Right to Life March in Washington. More than one in ten participated in a volunteer program with a religious institute and World Youth Day.

Vocational Discernment

- On average, respondents were 19 years old when they first considered a vocation to religious life.
- Entrants to religious life were asked how much encouragement they received from various people when they first considered entering a religious institute. Respondents most frequently mentioned a member of their religious institute (93%), a spiritual director (93%), or a vocational director/team (92%) as at least "somewhat" encouraging to them when they first considered entering a religious institute.
- Four in five respondents report being encouraged at least "somewhat" by these people: friends outside the institute (83%), other men and women religious (77%), and diocesan priests (77%).
- Nearly all respondents were "somewhat" or "very much" attracted to religious life by a desire for prayer and spiritual growth (99%) and a sense of call to religious life (98%). Three in four or more were "very much" attracted by these aspects. Nine in ten respondents were at least "somewhat" attracted to religious life by a desire to be part of a community (94%), a desire to be of service (92%), and a desire to be more committed to the Church (88%), with six in ten or more saying these attracted them "very much."

- Almost all report that they were at least “somewhat” attracted by the spirituality and the mission of their institute. Nine in ten report they were at least “somewhat” attracted to their religious institute by the community life (93%), the example of members (93%), and the prayer life of their institute (92%). Just under nine in ten report they were at least “somewhat” attracted to the religious institute by the ministries of the institute (89%), the institute’s fidelity to the Church (87%), and welcome and encouragement by members (85%).
- Men and women entering religious life were asked to indicate how they first became acquainted with their religious institute. Three in ten report being acquainted to their religious institute in an institution where members served (32%), through their own search (32%), and through the recommendation of a friend or advisor (30%). One in five first became acquainted with their institute through the reputation or history of the institute (21%) and through a relative or a friend in the institute (17%).
- Men are more likely than women to have become acquainted with their religious institute in an institution where members served and through the reputation or history of the institute.
- Entrants were asked how helpful selected vocation experiences were to them in discerning their call to their institute before they entered. Among those who participated in these activities, nearly all report that “Come and See” experience (96%) and contact with vocation director (95%) are at least “somewhat” helpful.
- More than nine in ten report that contact with institute members (94%), vocation or discernment retreat (94%), and live in experience (94%) are “very helpful” to them in discerning their call to their religious institute.
- Nine in ten indicate that visit(s) to local community(s) (90%), visit(s) to the Motherhouse (90%), ministry with institute members (88%), and spiritual direction (88%) are at least “somewhat” helpful to them in discerning their call to their religious institute.

Experience of Religious Life, Attractions, and Challenges

- Entrants were asked how much influence various aspects of their religious institute had on their decision to enter that institute. Almost all respondents report that the charism of the institute at least “somewhat” influenced their decision to enter their religious institute (95%), with eight in ten reporting this aspect influenced their decision “very much.”
- Just over nine in ten respondents report having been at least “somewhat” influenced in their decision to enter their religious institute by the community life in the institute

(94%). Nine in ten respondents report having been at least “somewhat” influenced in their decision to enter their religious institute by the prayer life or prayer styles in the institute (88%), the lifestyle of members (87%), and the types of ministry of its members (86%).

- Respondents were asked to evaluate how important each of these different types of prayer are to them. Almost all respondents say private personal prayer (99%) and daily Eucharist (97%) are at least “somewhat” important to them. Nine in ten indicate that these elements are “very” important. Nine in ten respondents report Eucharistic Adoration (91%) and Liturgy of the Hours (90%) are at least “somewhat” important to them.
- Entrants to religious life were asked to indicate the importance to them of various aspects of community life. Almost all respondents report living with other members (96%), praying with other members (96%), and sharing meals together (95%) as at least “somewhat” important to them. More than nine in ten respondents report that working with other members (93%) and socializing/sharing leisure time together (93%) are at least “somewhat” important to them.
- New entrants were asked if the members of their institute wear a habit. Just over seven in ten indicate that members of their institute wear a habit. Women are more likely than men to say that members of their institute wear a habit.
- Entrants were asked to rate various aspects of their religious institutes. Nearly all respondents rate their religious institute as “good” or “excellent” in commitment to ministry (96%), faithfulness to prayer and spiritual growth (96%), opportunities for personal growth (95%), opportunities for spiritual growth (95%), quality of community life (95%), and relationships with one another (95%).
- Just over nine in ten respondents rate their religious institute as “good” or “excellent” in focus on mission (94%), sense of identity as institute members (93%), welcome and support of newer members (93%), communal prayer experiences (92%), opportunities for ongoing formation (92%), and response to the needs of our time (92%).
- In written comments at the end of the survey, responding entrants mention aspects of community life as both the greatest attraction and the greatest challenge of religious life.

Introduction

In 2014, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University to conduct an annual survey of women and men who enter religious life each year in the United States. For this project, CARA was asked to gather information about the characteristics and experiences of these women and men in a fashion similar to the survey of perpetually professed that CARA conducts each year for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, which is released each year for the World Day of Consecrated Life in February. CARA designed a questionnaire based on previous CARA research on religious life and reviewed it with a representative from the Hilton Foundation. This report presents results of this survey of women and men of the Entrance Class of 2020.

To obtain the names and contact information for these women and men (postulants or novices in institutes that do not have postulancy), CARA contacted all major superiors of all religious institutes that belong to either the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) or the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR), the two leadership conferences of women religious in the United States. CARA also contacted the major superiors of all religious institutes who belong to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM). Finally, CARA contacted the major superiors of 132 contemplative communities of women in the United States that were identified by the USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations.

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

This report is arranged in three parts: Part I describes characteristics of the institutes that responded to the request for names as well as characteristics of the Entrance Class of 2020. Part II describes aspects of the vocational discernment of the Entrance Class of 2020. Part III describes their experience of religious life so far and reports, in their own words, what attracts them to religious life and what they find most challenging about religious life.

Interpreting this Report

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

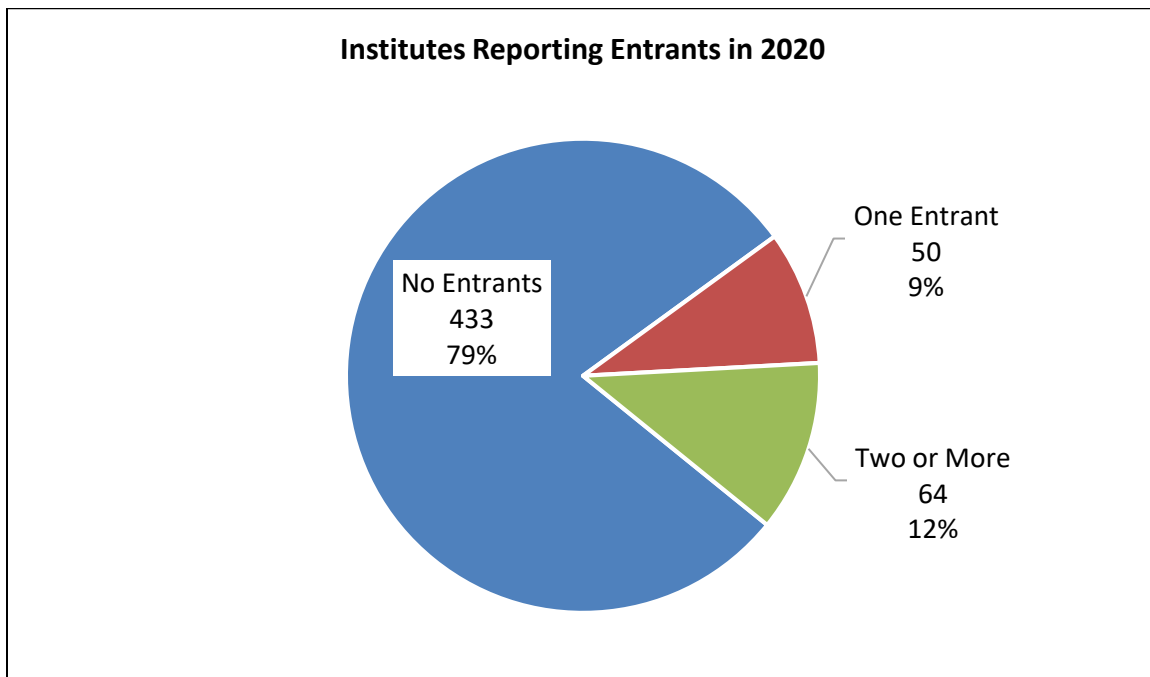
Readers may also wish to compare the difference between the two extreme responses, say “poor” and “excellent,” to compare the level of intensity with which opposing opinions are held. These comparisons and others may be drawn by referring to the actual percentage responses given in Appendix I. That appendix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

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

Part I Characteristics of Responding Institutes and Entrants

Institutes Reporting New Entrants in 2020

CARA asked the 747 religious congregations, provinces, or monasteries in the United States that were identified by LCWR, CMSWR, CMSM, and contemplative communities identified by the USCCB to provide the names of women and men as postulants who entered their religious institute in the United States in 2020. A total of 547 major superiors responded (73%) with 309 names of women and men. Two major superiors responded that they would not participate this year. The Entrance Class of 2020 consists of 166 men (reported by CMSM superiors) and 143 women.



A total of 433 major superiors (79% of those responding) reported that they had no one enter the institute in 2020, another 50 major superiors (9%) reported one new entrant, and 64 major superiors (12%) reported two or more new entrants.

Gender

Among the 204 respondents who entered religious life in 2020, half of respondents (49%) are women and another half (51%) are men. Among men, seven in ten expect to become priests and three in ten plan to become a perpetually professed brother.

Age of the Entrance Class of 2020

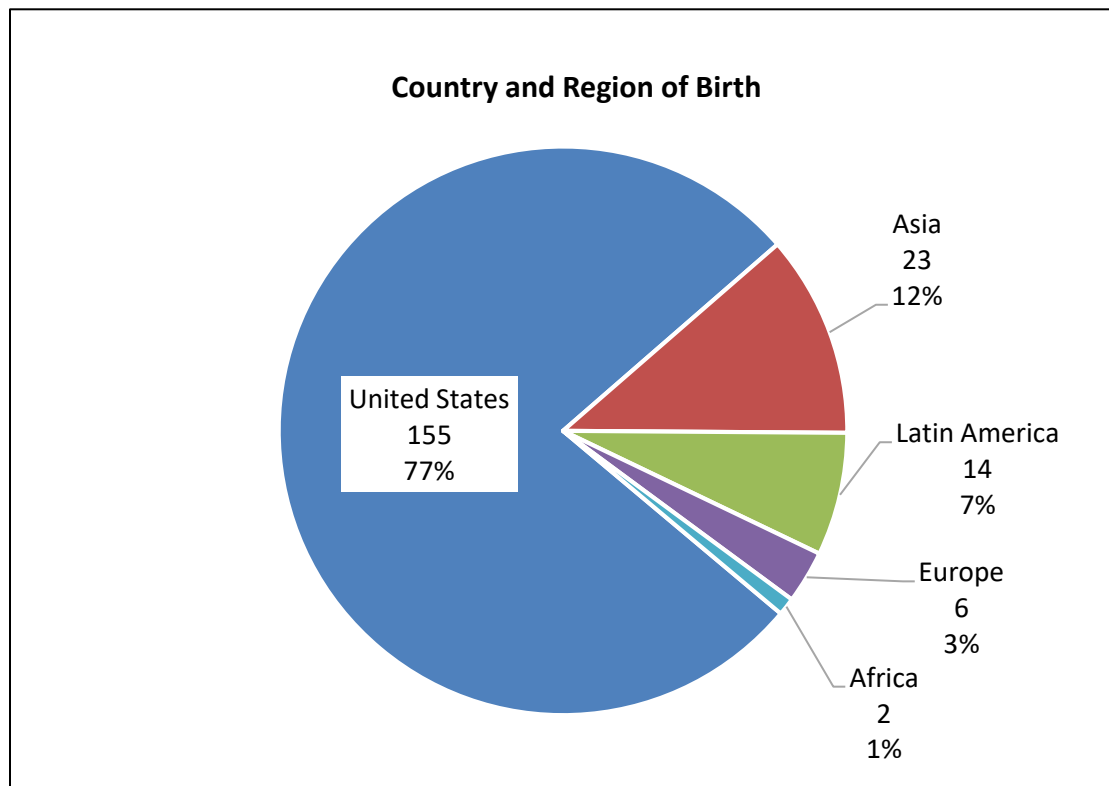
The average age of respondents of the Entrance Class of 2020 is 29. Half of the respondents are age 26 or younger.

Age of Women and Men Entering Religious Life			
Percentage in each age category			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
25 and younger	48	47	51
Age 26-35	38	38	39
Age 36-45	7	10	3
Age 46-55	3	2	3
Age 56 and older	4	3	5
Average age	29	29	28
Median age	26	26	25
Range in ages	18-66	19-65	18-66

The youngest responding sister or nun of the Entrance Class of 2020 is 18 and the oldest is 66. Among the men, the youngest is 19, with one man entering at the age of 65. Regardless of gender, nearly nine in ten respondents (86%) are 35 or younger.

Region or Country of Birth and Age at Entry to United States

Responding postulants were born in 21 countries. About eight in ten (77%) respondents were born in the United States.



- One in ten (12%) were born in a country in Asia, mainly in Vietnam (N = 11) and the Philippines (N = 6).
- One in 16 were born in a country in Latin America, mainly in Mexico (N = 8).
- Six respondents were born in a country in Europe.
- Two respondents were born in a country in Africa.

Respondents who were born outside the United States have lived in the United States for an average of 12 years. Half first came to live in the United States in 2007 or earlier.

Entrance to the United States				
	Year	<u>Age at Entry</u>		
	Overall	Overall	Men	Women
Mean	2007	19	18	19
Median	2010	17	17	17
Range	1960-2020	1-54	2-42	1-54

On average, responding foreign-born religious came to live in the United States at the age of 19. Half were age 17 or younger when they came to live in the United States. The oldest woman was 54 while the oldest man was 42 at the time they entered the United States.

Race and Ethnic Background

Three-fifths of those who entered a religious institute report their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian/European American/white (63%).

<i>What best describes your racial or ethnic background?</i>			
Percentage in each category			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Caucasian/European American/white	63	62	63
Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	15	14	17
Hispanic/Latino(a)	12	12	12
African/African American/black	3	4	1
Mixed race	3	4	2
Native American or American Indian	1	0	1
Other	4	4	4

More than one in ten of the Entrance Class of 2020 identifies as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian (15%) and Hispanic/Latino(a) (12%). Three percent identify as African/African American/black. One person identifies as Native American or American Indian. Seven percent identify as mixed or some other race or ethnicity.

Differences by Country of Birth

- Among those who were born in the United States, almost four in five (78%) report being Caucasian/European American/white. One in ten identify as Hispanic or Latino(a) (9%).
- Among those born elsewhere outside the United States, nearly half of respondents identify as Asian/Pacific/Native Hawaiian (47%). One in five identify as Hispanic or Latino(a) (22%). One in ten identify as Caucasian/ European/ American/white (9%) and African/African American/black (9%).

Religious Background

Nine in ten respondents (91%) have been Catholic since birth. Women are little more likely than men to become Catholic since birth.

Catholic Background			
<i>Percentage responding</i>			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Catholic since birth	91	87	95
Became Catholic later in life	9	13	5

Among those who became Catholic later in life, more than nine in ten (94%) participated in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. These entrants came from a variety of faiths: Anabaptist, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Baptist, Christian Protestant, Episcopalian, Evangelical, Judaism, Non-denominational, Presbyterian, Protestant, Reform Judaism, Seventh-day Adventist, United Methodist

Nearly all respondents (95%) report that when they were growing up they had at least one parent who was Catholic. Four in five (80%) report that both parents were Catholic.

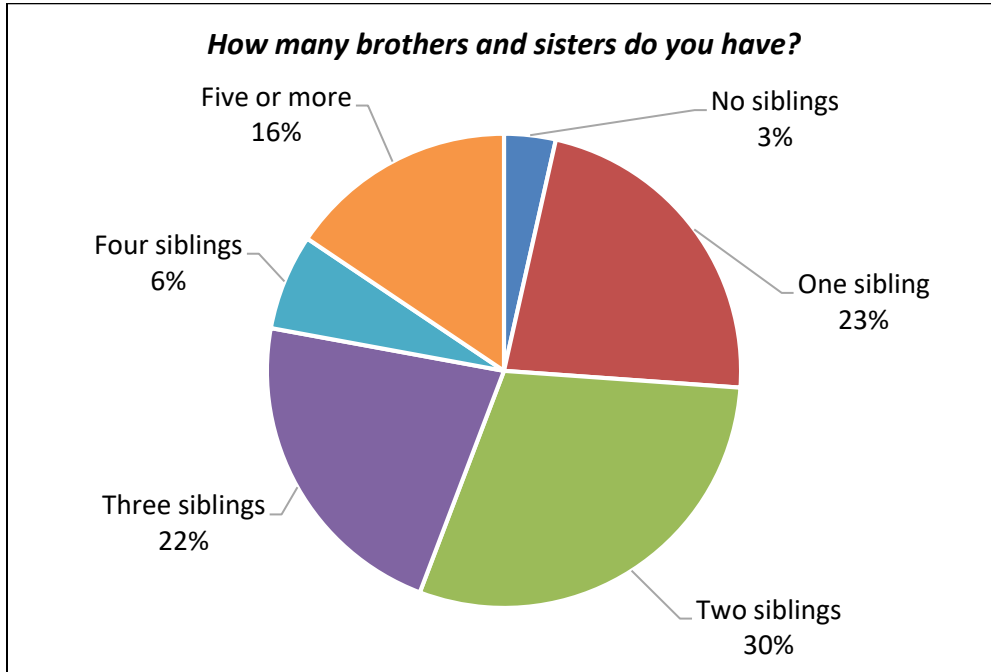
Religious Background of Respondents' Parents			
<i>Percentage responding</i>			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Both parents Catholic	80	76	84
Mother Catholic, father not	10	11	9
Father Catholic, mother not	5	7	2
Neither parent was Catholic	5	6	5

Respondents who had non-Catholic parents report that the parents were either Anabaptist, Ancestor Worship, Baptist/Lutheran, Church of Christ, Episcopalian, Judaism, Lutheran, Methodist, Nondenominational Christian, Non-denominational Protestant, non-practicing Lutheran, Non-religious, Orthodox, Presbyterian, Presbyterian then Unitarian, Universalist, Protestant, Reform Judaism, Seventh-day Adventist, United Methodist, or none.

Regardless of the religious tradition of their parents, two in three (64%) respondents report that religion was “very important” to their mothers and nearly half (45%) report that religion was “very important” to their fathers.

Family Background

On average, members of the Entrance Class of 2020 have three siblings. The most common response to this question, among women and men, is one or two siblings (53%).



- Only 3% say he or she is an only child, one quarter have one sibling (23%), meanwhile three quarters have two or more siblings (74%).

Around a third report being the eldest. Another third report being a middle child. And one quarter report being the youngest.

What is your birth order?
Percentage in each category

	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Eldest	32	33	32
Middle	37	37	37
Youngest	27	28	27
Only child	4	3	5

Discussions about Vocations While Growing Up

Overall, about half respondents (51%) say that it was easy for them to start a conversation with their family about their vocation. Men are more likely than women to say that starting a discussion with their family was easy for them.

Discussions about Vocations While Growing Up			
Percentage responding “Yes” to each question*			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Overall, was starting a discussion with your family about your vocation easy for you?	51	60	42
Did another family member ever speak to you about a vocation to priesthood or religious life?	29	31	27
Did your mother ever speak to you about a vocation to the priesthood or religious life?	28	27	29
Did your father ever speak to you about a vocation to priesthood or religious life?	18	18	18
*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one category.			

- Three in ten (29%) report that another family member ever spoke to them about a vocation to priesthood or religious life.
- Another three in ten (28%) report that their mother ever spoke to them about a vocation to priesthood or religious life.
- Two in ten (18%) report that their father ever spoke to them about a vocation to priesthood or religious life.

Two-thirds (66%) report that they got to know a priest or a religious brother or sister who was not a family member while they were growing up. Three in ten have a relative who is a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun. Responding women religious are more likely than men to have a relative who is a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun.

Familiarity with Priests and/or Religious Brothers and Sisters/Nuns while Growing Up <i>Percentage responding "Yes" to each question</i>			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Outside of family members, while you were growing up did you ever get to know a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun?	66	64	67
Do you have a relative who is a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun?	31	26	36

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

Education Level Before Entering a Religious Institute

The responding members of the Entrance Class of 2020 were highly educated before entering. Half (54%) report having earned a bachelor's degree and about a quarter (23%) earned a master's or a doctoral degree before entering their religious institute.

<i>What was your highest level of education you completed before you entered your religious institute?</i>			
Percentage responding			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
High school or less	11	9	14
Some college	13	12	14
Bachelor's degree	54	58	49
Master's degree	19	17	21
Doctoral degree	4	4	3
Other			

One in ten (10%) respondents of the Entrance Class of 2020 completed high school or less before entering their religious institute. One in eight (13%) completed some college before entering. Responding men are slightly more likely than responding women religious to have attained a bachelor's degree before entering.

Just over one in ten respondents (12%) report being home schooled at some time in their educational background.

<i>Were you ever home-schooled?</i>			
Percentage responding "Yes" or "No"			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Yes	12	6	18
No	88	94	82
Average home-schooled year	7	8	7

Among those who were home schooled, the average length of time they were home schooled was seven years (an average of eight years for men and seven years for women). More women than men report being home schooled (18% of compared to 6% of men).

Catholic Education Before Entering a Religious Institute

Just over half of respondents attended a parish-based religious education program (52%) and four in ten (45%) attended a Catholic elementary or middle school. Four in ten attended a Catholic high school and another four in ten attended a Catholic college/university before entering their religious institute. One in five attended a Catholic ministry formation program before entering.

<i>Did you attend any of the following before you entered? *</i>			
Percentage responding "Yes" to each question			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Parish-based religious education/CCD/PSR	52	49	55
Catholic elementary or middle school	45	46	44
Catholic high school	38	41	36
Catholic college/university	38	36	40
Catholic ministry formation program	21	27	16

Members of the Entrance Class of 2020 are three times more likely than other U.S. 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 45% among entrants. Responding entrants of 2020 are nearly five times more likely than other U.S. adult Catholics to have attended a Catholic high school (38% of respondents, compared to 8% of U.S. adult Catholics) and much more likely to have attended a Catholic college/university (38% of respondents, compared to just 5% of U.S. adult Catholics).

Whether or not they ever attended a Catholic elementary or high school, half of respondents (52%) participated in a religious education program in their parish. Among respondents who said they participated in a religious education program in their parish, 63% did not report attending a Catholic elementary school and 72% did not attend a Catholic high school.

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

Participation in Religious Programs, Activities, or Ministries

Many respondents were active in parish life and/or other religious programs or activities before entering their religious institute. Almost all respondents (97%) participated in at least one of the programs or activities listed in the table below before entering.

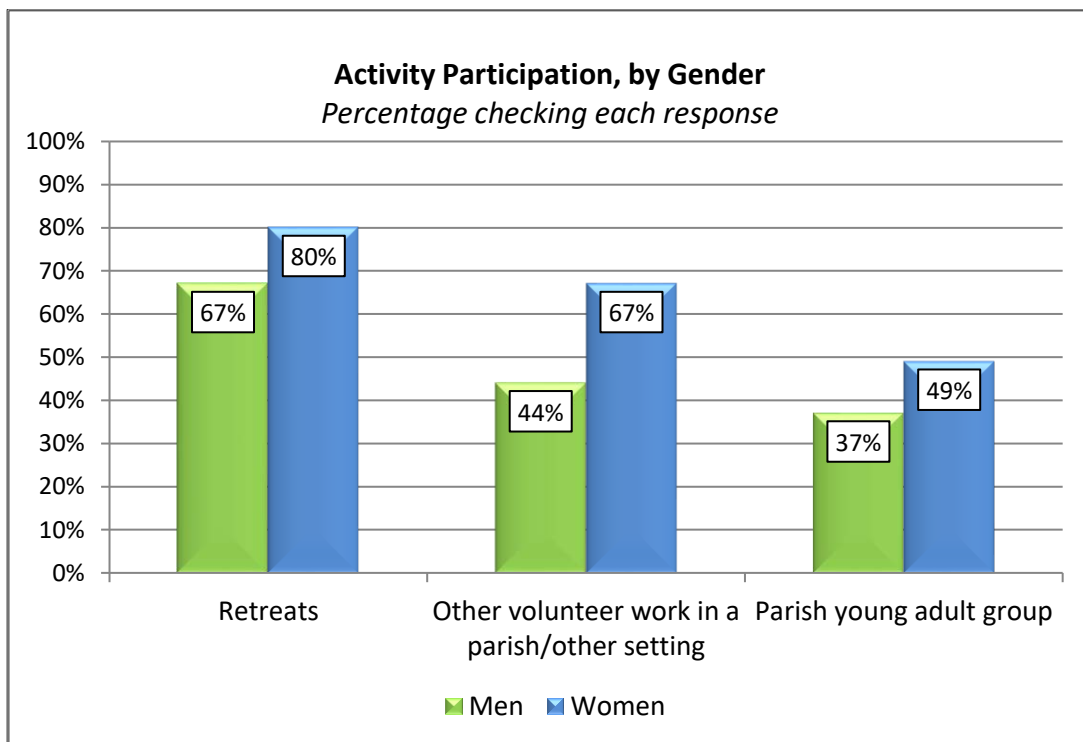
<i>Aside from parish-based religious education, did you ever participate in any of the these before you entered?</i>			
Percentage checking each response*			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Retreats	74	67	80
Other volunteer work in a parish/other setting	55	44	67
Campus ministry during college	50	50	51
Parish young adult group	43	37	49
Parish youth group or Life Teen during elementary or middle school years	40	38	43
Right to Life March in Washington	36	33	40
Campus ministry during high school years	27	25	28
Religious institute volunteer program (e.g. Mercy Corps or Jesuit Volunteer Corps)	13	16	11
World Youth Day	12	8	17
National Catholic Youth Conference	6	4	8
*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one category.			

- Three in four (74%) respondents participated in retreats. Women are more likely than men to have participated in retreats before entering a religious institute.
- More than half (55%) participated in various types of voluntary work in a parish or other setting.
- Half (50%) participated in campus ministry during college.
- Four in ten participated in the followings:
 - Parish young adult group (43%)
 - Parish youth group or Life Teen during elementary or middle school years (40%)
 - Right to Life March in Washington (36%)

- Nearly three in ten (27%) participated in the campus ministry during high school years.
- More than one in ten (13%) participated in a volunteer program with a religious institute and World Youth Day (12%).
- One in twenty (6%) participated in a National Catholic Youth Conference.

Comparisons by Gender

Responding women religious are most likely to participate in the following activities before entering their religious institute.



Four in five respondents (80%) served in one or more specified parish ministries before entering their religious institute, either in a paid ministry position or as a volunteer. The most common ministry service reported was liturgical ministry (e.g., lector, extraordinary minister), followed by faith formation ministry.

Aside from parish-based religious education, did you ever participate in any of these before you entered?
 Percentage checking each response

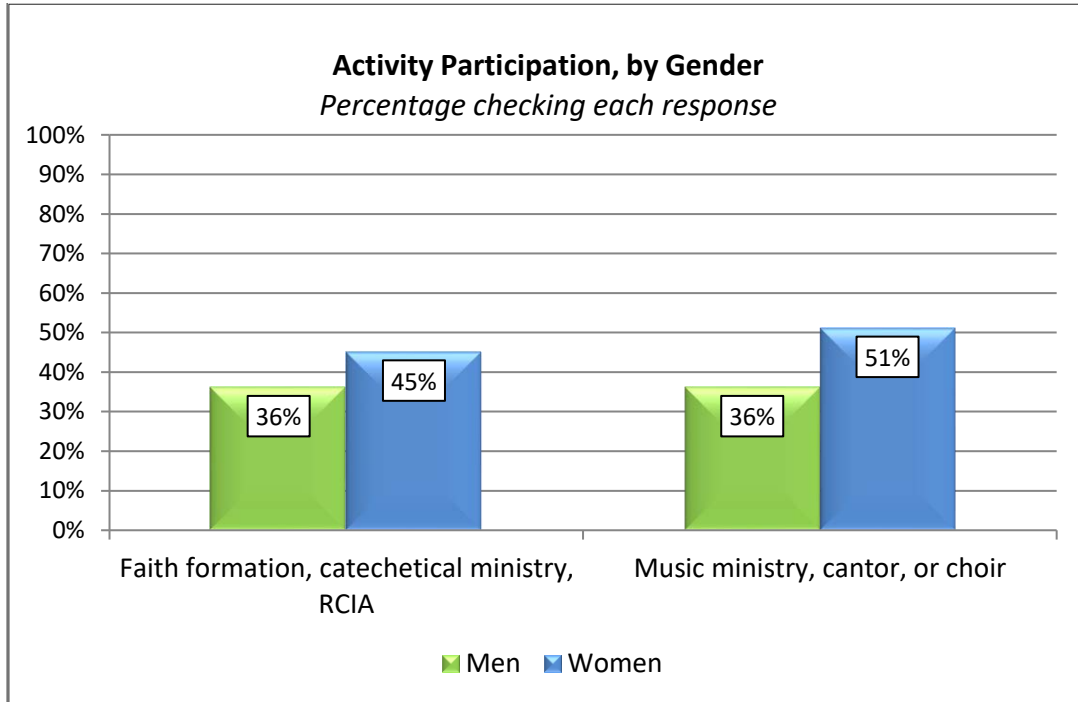
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Liturgical ministry (e.g., lector, extraordinary minister)	63	64	61
Music ministry, cantor, choir	43	36	51
Faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA team	40	36	45

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

- Among the ministries listed on the survey, three in five respondents (63%) report that they served in liturgical ministry roles, such as lector or extraordinary minister of Communion.
- Two in five respondents (43%) report participating in music ministry, cantor, or choir.
- Likewise, two in five (40%) participate in faith formation, catechetical ministry or RCIA.

Comparisons by Gender

More women than men report participating in faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA and music ministry, cantor, or choir before entering their religious institute.



Part II Vocational Discernment

Consideration of a Vocation to Religious Life

On average, respondents were 19 years old when they first considered a vocation to religious life. Half were 18 or younger when they first considered a vocation.

Age When First Considered a Vocation to Religious Life			
	Overall	Men	Women
Mean age	19	20	18
Median age	18	20	17
Range of ages	3-58	4-58	3-55

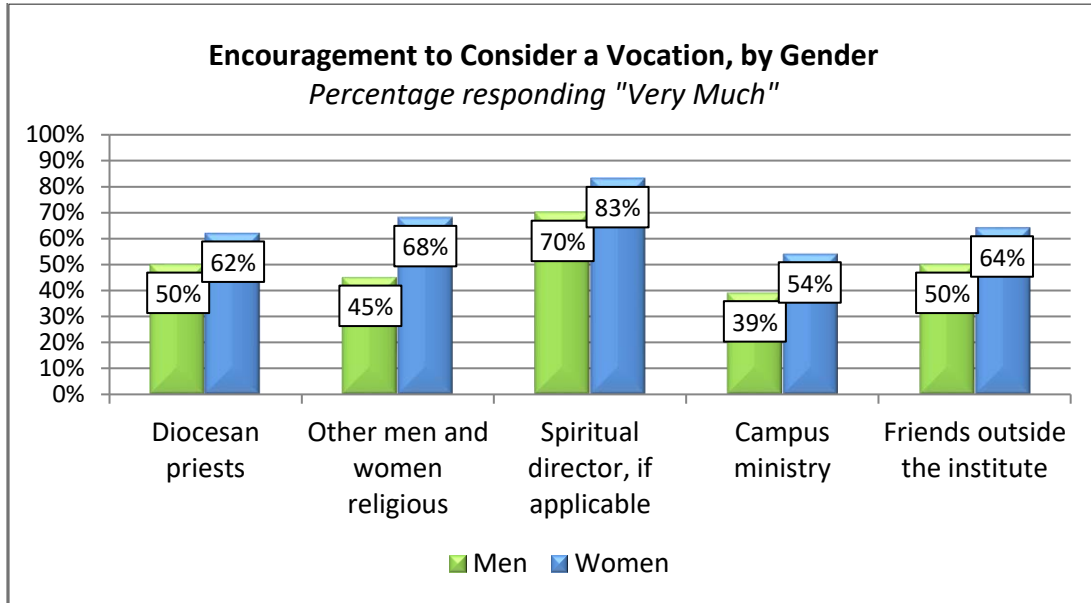
Entrants to religious life were asked how much encouragement they received from various people when they first considered entering a religious institute.

<i>How much encouragement did you receive from these when you first considered entering a religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very Much”	“Very Much” Only
	%	%
Members of your institute	93	74
Spiritual director, if applicable	93	76
Vocation director/team	92	77
Friends outside the institute	83	57
Other men and women religious	77	56
Diocesan priests	77	55
People in your parish	74	51
People in your school or workplace	73	46
Your parents	69	44
Campus minister, if applicable	60	44
Other family members	59	30
Your siblings	58	31

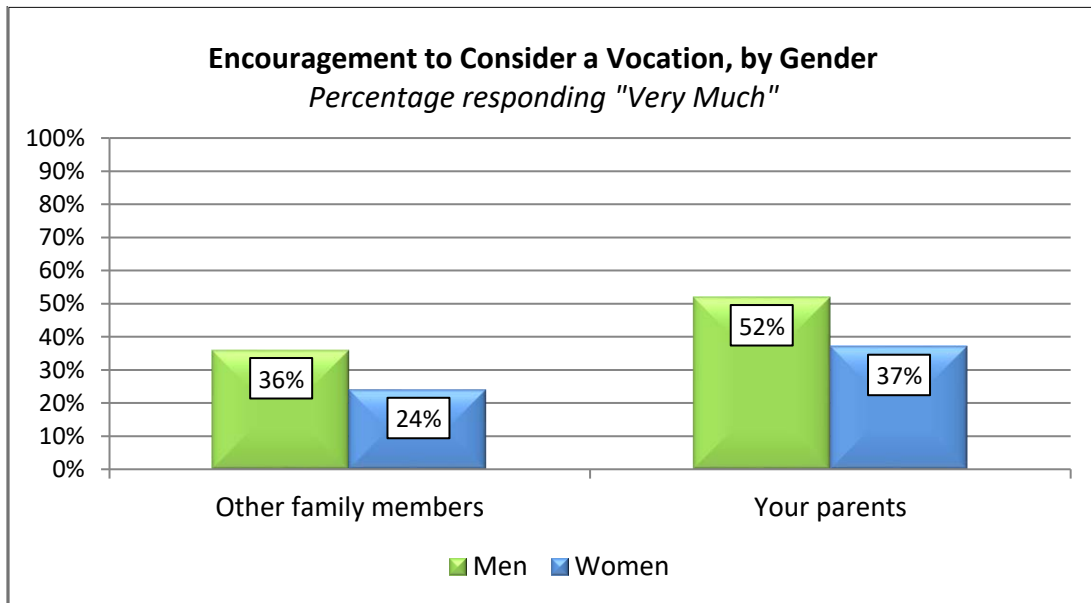
- Respondents most frequently mentioned a member of their religious institute (93%), a spiritual director (93%), or a vocational director/team (92%) as at least “somewhat” encouraging to them when they first considered entering a religious institute.
- Four in five respondents report being encouraged at least “somewhat” by these people: friends outside the institute (83%), other men and women religious (77%), and diocesan priests (77%).
- Seven in ten report being encouraged at least “somewhat” by these people: people in your parish (74%), people in your school or workplace (73%), and their parents (69%).
- Six in ten report being at least “somewhat” encouraged by campus minister (60%), other family members (59%), and siblings (58%).

Comparisons by Gender

Women are more likely than men to receive “very much” encouragement to consider a vocation from the people in the chart below.



In contrast, women religious are less likely than men religious to receive “very much” encouragement from their parents and other family members.



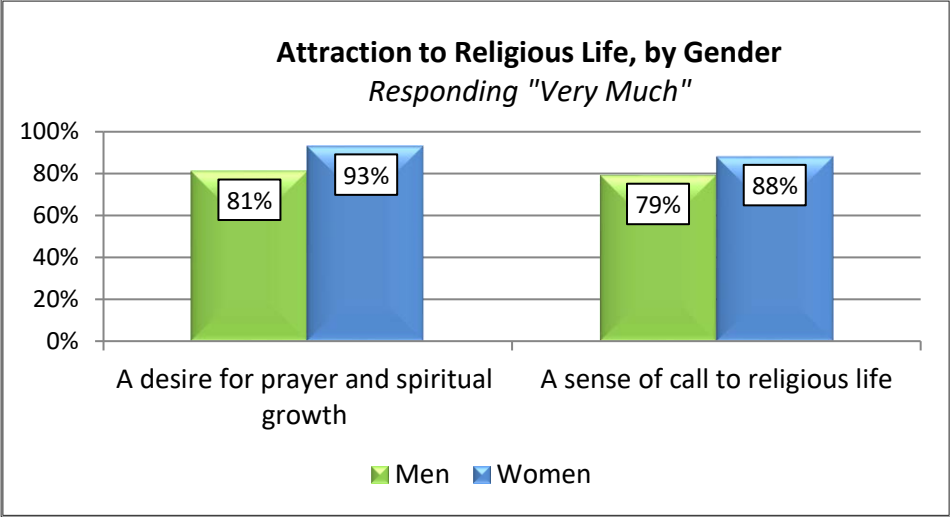
Attraction to Religious Life

Entrants in 2020 were asked how much various elements attracted them to religious life. Nearly all respondents were “somewhat” or “very much” attracted to religious life by a desire for prayer and spiritual growth (99%) and a sense of call to religious life (98%). Three in four or more were “very much” attracted by these aspects.

<i>How much did the following attract you to religious life?</i>		
Percentage responding “Somewhat” or “Very Much”		
	“Somewhat” or “Very Much”	“Very Much” Only
	%	%
A desire for prayer and spiritual growth	99	87
A sense of call to religious life	98	84
A desire to be part of a community	94	68
A desire to be of service	92	67
A desire to be more committed to the Church	88	60

- Nine in ten respondents were at least “somewhat” attracted to religious life by a desire to be part of a community (94%), a desire to be of service (92%), and a desire to be more committed to the Church (88%), with six in ten or more saying these attracted them “very much.”

More women than men report that a desire for prayer and spiritual growth and a sense of call to religious life “very much” attracted them to religious life.



Attraction to a Religious Institute

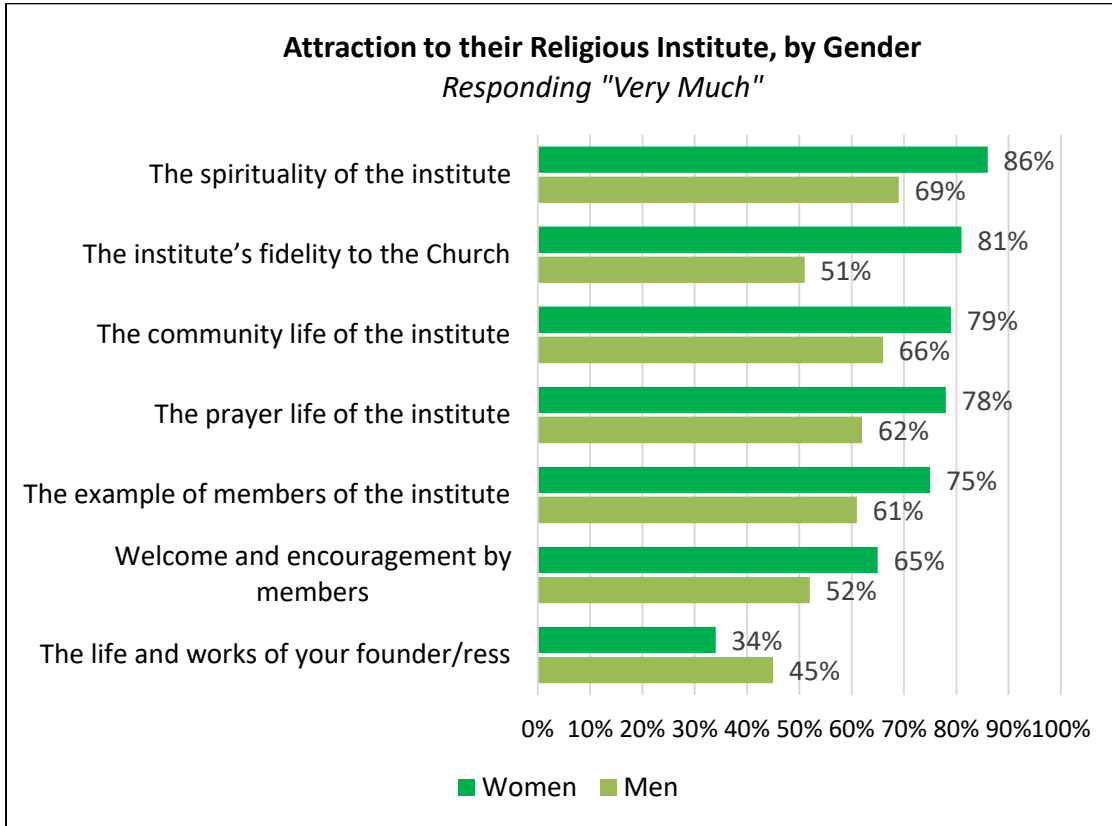
Entrants were asked how much each of several aspects of religious life attracted them to their particular religious institute. Almost all report that they were at least “somewhat” attracted by the spirituality and the mission of their institute.

<i>How much did these attract you to your religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very Much”	“Very Much” Only
	%	%
The spirituality of the institute	98	78
The mission of the institute	95	71
The community life of the institute	93	72
The example of members of the institute	93	68
The prayer life of the institute	92	70
The ministries of the institute	89	60
The institute’s fidelity to the Church	87	66
Welcome and encouragement by members	85	58
The life and works of your founder/ress	72	40
A personal invitation by a member	54	34

- Nine in ten report they were at least “somewhat” attracted to their religious institute by the community life (93%), the example of members (93%), and the prayer life of their institute (92%). Seven in ten say these elements “very much” attracted them to their religious institute.
- Just under nine in ten report they were at least “somewhat” attracted to the religious institute by the ministries of the institute (89%), the institute’s fidelity to the Church (87%), and welcome and encouragement by members (85%). About six in ten say these elements “very much” attracted them to their religious institute.
- Seven in ten report they were attracted by the life and works of their found/ress (72%). Four in ten say this element attracted them “very much” to their religious institute.
- More than half report they were at least “somewhat” attracted to their religious institute by a personal invitation by a member (54%). Three in ten report this element attracted them “very much” to their religious institute.

Comparisons by Gender

More women than men report that most of the aspects in the chart below “very much” attracted them to their religious institute.



Initial Acquaintance with the Religious Institute

Men and women entering religious life were asked to indicate how they first became acquainted with their religious institute.

<i>How did you first become acquainted with your religious institute?</i>			
Percentage checking each response*			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
In an institution where members served	32	44	21
Through your own search	32	38	27
Through the recommendation of a friend or advisor	30	29	32
Through the reputation or history of the institute	21	31	10
Through a relative or a friend in the institute	17	20	14
Through working with a member of the institute	15	18	11
Through web or social media promotional materials	14	11	17
Through an event sponsored by the institute	7	6	8
Through a media story about the institute or member	7	6	9
Through a vocation fair	6	7	6
Through a vocation match or placement service	4	6	3
Through print promotional materials	3	2	3
Other	17	12	23

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

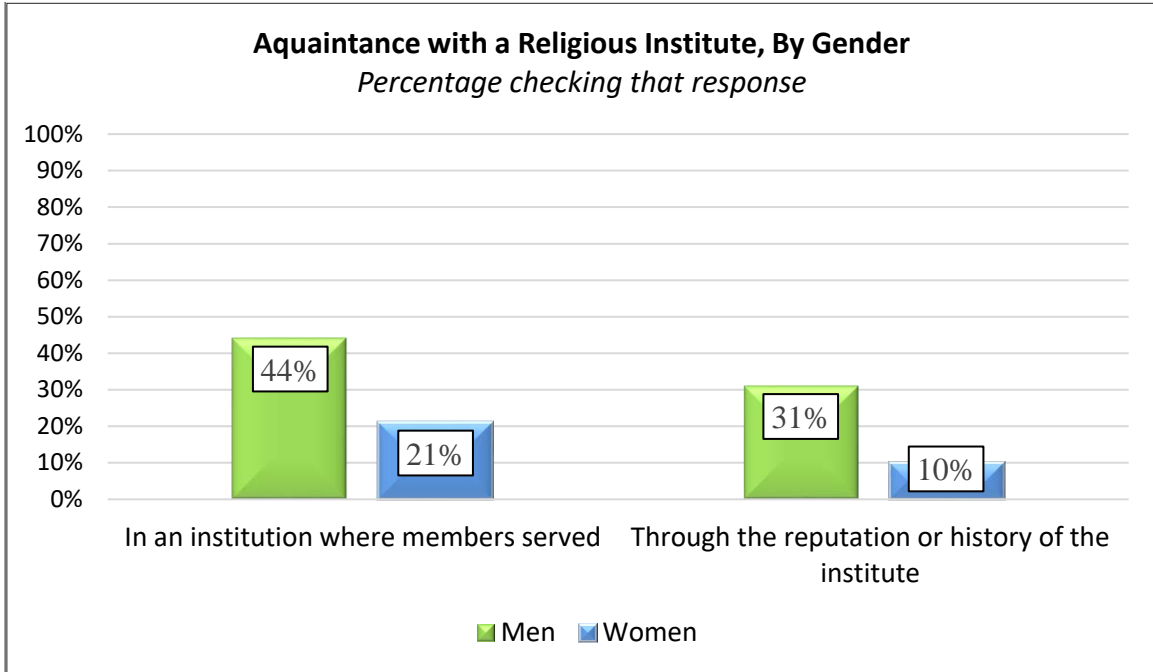
- Three in ten report being acquainted to their religious institute in an institution where members served (32%), through their own search (32%), and through the recommendation of a friend or advisor (30%).
- One in five first became acquainted with their institution through the reputation or history of the institute (21%) and through a relative or a friend in the institute (17%).
- Just over one in ten first became acquainted with their institution through working with a member of the institute (15%) and through web or social media promotional materials (14%).

- One in sixteen first became acquainted with their institution through an event sponsored by the institute (7%) and through a media story about the institute or member (7%).
- One in twenty know their institute through a vocation fair (6%) or through a vocation match or placement service (4%).
- Only three percent report getting to know their religious institutes through print promotional materials.
- One in six (17%) first became acquainted with their religious institute through some “other” means (often during their college years). The “other” responses are listed below, lightly edited:
 - A book written by a member of the order
 - A vocation panel
 - A vocation retreat, the vocations director came all the way to Montana from Mt. Angel Abbey
 - Archdiocese Vocation Directory
 - Attending a school the institution founded
 - Being in the Faith Formation program ran by the Lovers of the Holy Cross sisters
 - Campus Ministry Service Trip
 - Come & See Retreat
 - Documentary on formed.org
 - During a lay missionary experience with the religious institute
 - Focus staff training and conference
 - I met the vocation's director
 - I participated in a retreat at the Techny Towers and first found out about the SVDs while on the retreat.
 - Invited to a discernment retreat by a friend of the institute
 - Masses celebrated by priests from institute
 - Meeting members at a religious conference
 - My parish priest
 - My parish sent me here for a confirmation retreat.
 - Overnight vocations retreat in my diocese
 - Randomly met a vocation director at my college and stayed in touch with him for four years through snapchat. He persisted in asking me to visit. I finally visited after I graduated from college and began to think about religious life with [Name of religious institute].
 - Read a biography of a member of the institute
 - Shrine ministry
 - Sibling
 - Spiritual director
 - Spontaneous meeting at a Catholic Camp where I was volunteering.

- Through a discernment event sponsored by my college's campus ministry
- Through a retreat that the institute participated in
- Through a talk/ social they gave
- Through meeting them at Church
- Through NET ministries
- Vision Vocation Network
- Visited with some other people well before I thought of religious life
- vocation team visited the campus and continued relationship
- Youth 2000

Comparisons by Gender

Men are more likely than women to have become acquainted with their religious institute in an institution where members served or through the reputation or history of the institute



Helpfulness of Discernment Programs and Experiences

Entrants were asked how helpful selected vocation experiences were to them in discerning their call to their institute before they entered. This section only reports those who participated in these activities.

If you participated in any of the following with your religious institute before you entered, how helpful were these to you in discerning your call to your institute?

Percentage responding

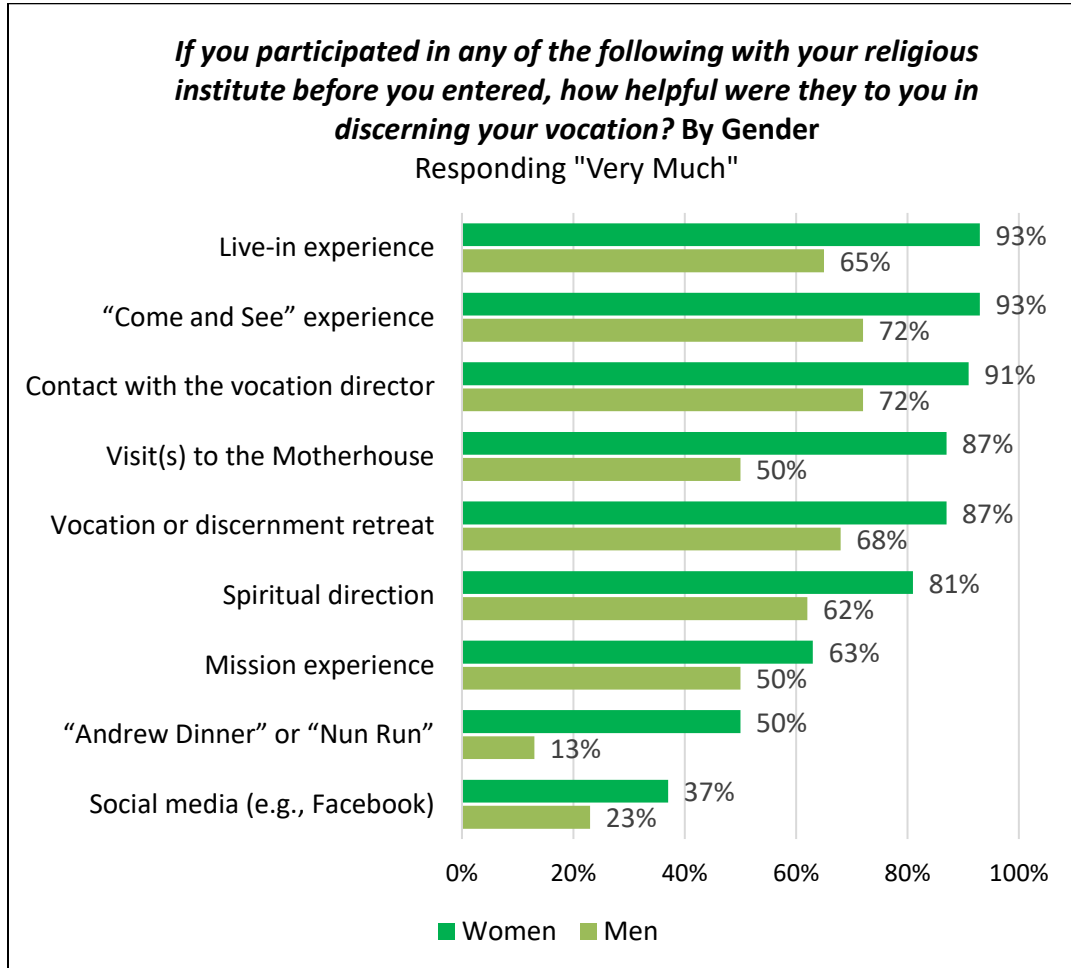
	“Somewhat” or “Very Helpful”	“Very Helpful” Only
	%	%
“Come and See” experience	96	82
Contact with vocation director	95	81
Contact with institute members	94	76
Vocation or discernment retreat	94	77
Live in experience	94	78
Visit(s) to local community(s)	90	67
Visit(s) to the Motherhouse	90	76
Ministry with institute members	88	60
Spiritual direction	88	71
Mission experience	82	54
Meeting with a discernment group	72	47
Social media (e.g. Facebook)	63	30
“Andrew Dinner” or “Nun Run”	40	28

- Among those who participated in these activities, nearly all report that “Come and See” experience (96%) and contact with vocation director (95%) are at least “somewhat” helpful. Eight in ten respondents report that these contacts are “very helpful.”
- More than nine in ten report the followings are at least “somewhat” helpful, with eight in ten report they are “very helpful” to them in discerning their call to their religious institute:
 - Contact with institute members (94%)
 - Vocation or discernment retreat (94%)
 - Live in experience (94%)
- Nine in ten report the followings are at least “somewhat” helpful, with seven in ten report they are “very helpful” to them in discerning their call to their religious institute:

- Visit(s) to local community(s) (90%)
 - Visit(s) to the Motherhouse (90%)
 - Ministry with institute members (88%)
 - Spiritual direction (88%)
-
- Eight in ten (82%) report mission experience is at least “somewhat” helpful to them, with more than a half reporting this activity is “very helpful.”
 - Seven in ten (72%) report meeting with a discernment group is at least “somewhat” helpful to them, with half reporting this activity is “very helpful.”
 - Six in ten (63%) report social media (e.g. Facebook) is at least “somewhat” helpful to them, with three in ten reporting this activity is “very helpful.”
 - Four in ten (40%) report “Andrew Dinner” or “Nun Run” is at least “somewhat” helpful to them, with three in ten reporting this activity is “very helpful.”

Comparisons by Gender

More women than men report that these activities in the chart below were “very” helpful for them in discerning their call to their religious institute.



Part III Experience of Religious Life, Attractions, and Challenges

Influences on Decisions to Enter Religious Institutes

Entrants were asked how much influence various aspects of their religious institute had on their decision to enter their institute. Almost all respondents report that the charism of the institute at least “somewhat” influenced their decision to enter their religious institute (95%), with eight in ten reporting this aspect influenced their decision “very much.”

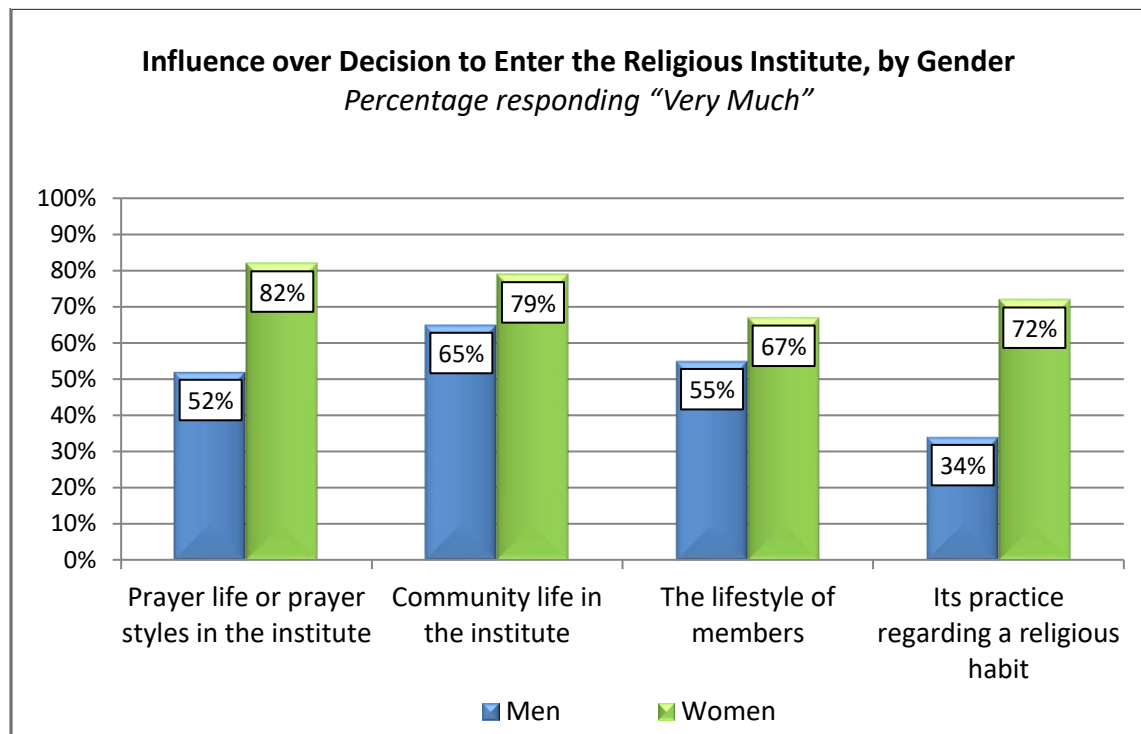
<i>How much did these influence your decision to enter your religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very Much”	“Very Much” Only
	%	%
The charism of the institute	95	78
Community life in the institute	94	72
Prayer life or prayer styles in the institute	88	67
The lifestyle of members	87	61
The types of ministry of its members	86	56
Its practice regarding a religious habit	68	53
The focus on the possibilities for the future of the institute	66	40
The ages of members	55	23
The size of the institute	50	14
Its geographic location(s)	50	21
Its internationality, if applicable	43	20
The cultural diversity of the members	32	17
The racial/ethnic background of members	26	11

- Just over nine in ten respondents report having been at least “somewhat” influenced in their decision to enter their religious institute by the community life in the institute (94%), with seven in ten saying this influenced them “very much.”
- Nine in ten respondents report having been at least “somewhat” influenced in their decision to enter their religious institute by the prayer life or prayer styles in the institute (88%), the lifestyle of members (87%), and the types of ministry of its members (86%). Six in ten or more say these elements influenced them “very much.”

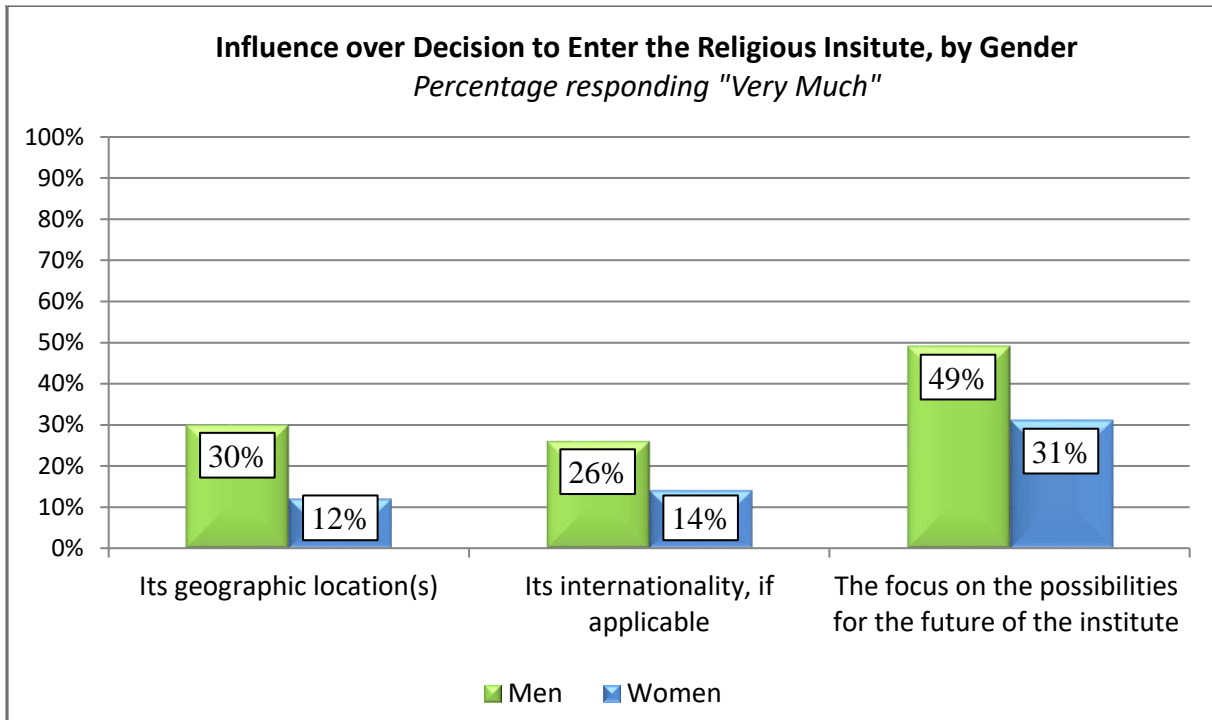
- Seven in ten indicate that they were at least “somewhat” influenced in their decision to enter their religious institute by its practice regarding a religious habit (68%) and the focus on the possibilities for the future of the institute (66%), with four in ten or more saying this influenced their decision “very much.”
- Half indicate having been at least “somewhat” influenced in their decision to enter their religious institute by the following aspects: the ages of members (55%), the size of the institute (50%), and its geographic location(s) (50). Around one in five say these influenced them “very much.”
- Four in ten say its internationality, if applicable (43%) and around three in ten say the cultural diversity of the members (32%) and the racial/ethnic background of members (26%) was at least “somewhat” influential to their decision to enter their institute. One in ten or more say these elements were “very” influential.

Comparisons by Gender

Women are most likely to report that prayer life or prayer styles in the institute, community life in the institute, the lifestyle of members, and its practice regarding a religious habit have “very much” influenced their decision to enter their religious institute.



In contrast, men are more likely than women to indicate that its geographic location(s), its internationality, and the focus on the possibilities for the future of the institute influenced them “very much.”



Prayer Practices

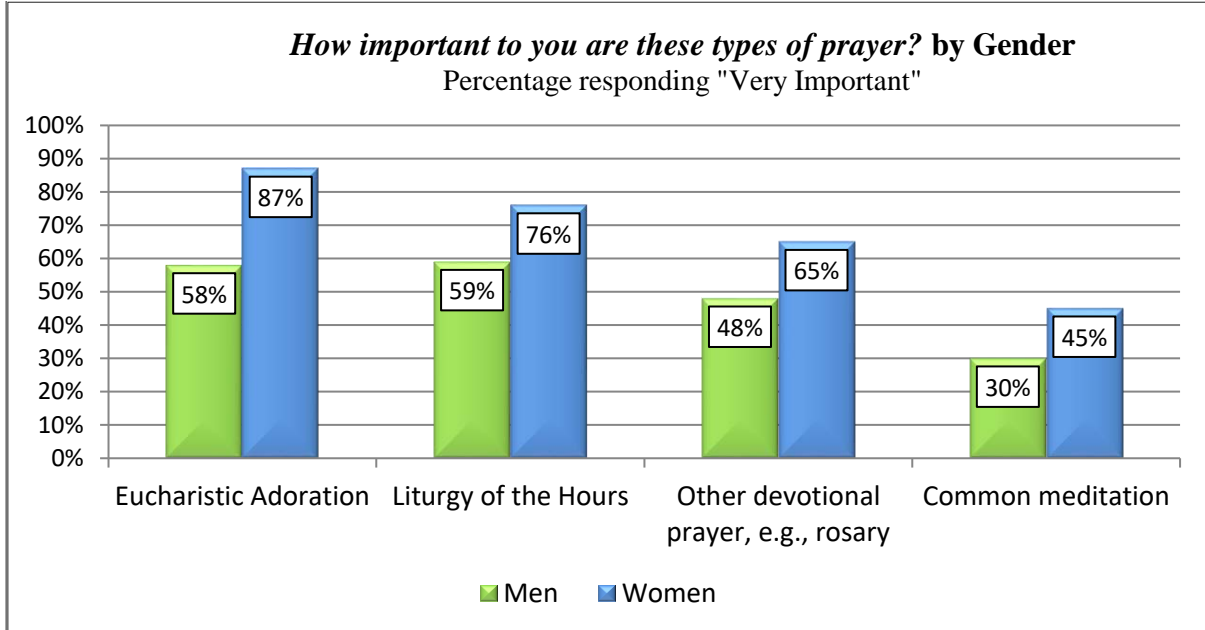
Respondents were asked to evaluate how important each of these different types of prayer are to them. Almost all respondents say private personal prayer (99%) and daily Eucharist (97%) are at least “somewhat” important to them. Nine in ten indicate that these elements are “very” important.

<i>How important to you are these types of prayer?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very”	“Very” Only
	%	%
Private personal prayer	99	91
Daily Eucharist	97	85
Eucharistic Adoration	91	73
Liturgy of the Hours	90	68
Other devotional prayer, e.g., rosary	84	56
Faith sharing	74	39
Common meditation	65	37
Non-liturgical common prayer	64	28

- Nine in ten respondents report Eucharistic Adoration (91%) and Liturgy of the Hours (90%) are at least “somewhat” important to them. Seven in ten say that these elements are “very” important to them.
- Eight in ten respondents report that other devotional prayers such as the rosary (84%) are at least “somewhat” important to them, with more than half reporting this practice is “very” important to them.
- Seven in ten respondents indicate that faith sharing (74%) and common meditation (65%) are at least “somewhat” important to them. Four in ten say these elements are “very” important to them.
- Six in ten say non-liturgical common prayer (64%) is at least “somewhat” important to them. Nearly three in ten indicate this is “very” important to them.

Comparisons by Gender

Women are more likely than men to say that the types of prayer mentioned in the chart below are “very” important to them.



Importance of Aspects of Community Life

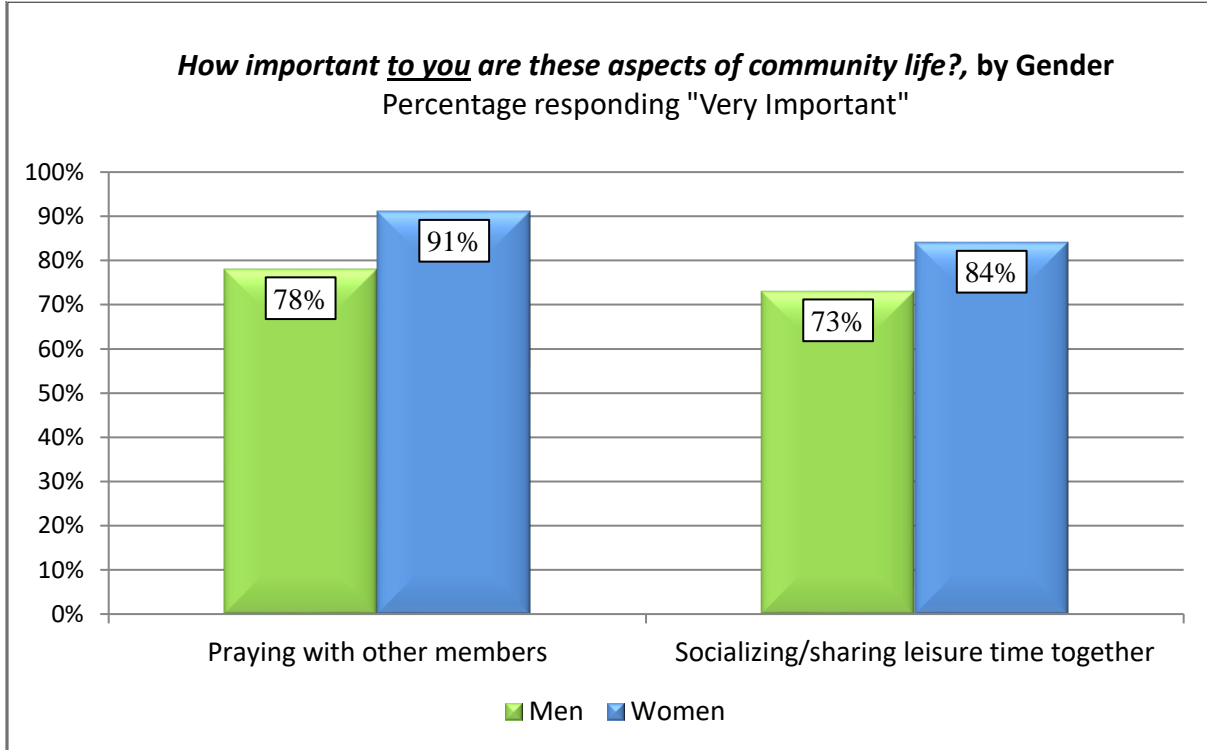
Entrants to religious life were asked to indicate the importance to them of various aspects of community life. Almost all respondents report living with other members (96%), praying with other members (96%), and sharing meals together (95%) as at least “somewhat” important to them. Eight in ten or more say these elements are “very” important to them.

<i>How important to you are these aspects of community life?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very”	“Very” Only
	%	%
Living with other members	96	85
Praying with other members	96	85
Sharing meals together	95	78
Working with other members	93	70
Socializing/sharing leisure time together	93	79

More than nine in ten respondents report that working with other members (93%) and socializing/sharing leisure time together (93%) are at least “somewhat” important to them. Seven in ten or more say these elements are very important.

Comparisons by Gender

Women are more likely than men to say that praying with other members and socializing/sharing leisure time together are “very” important to them.

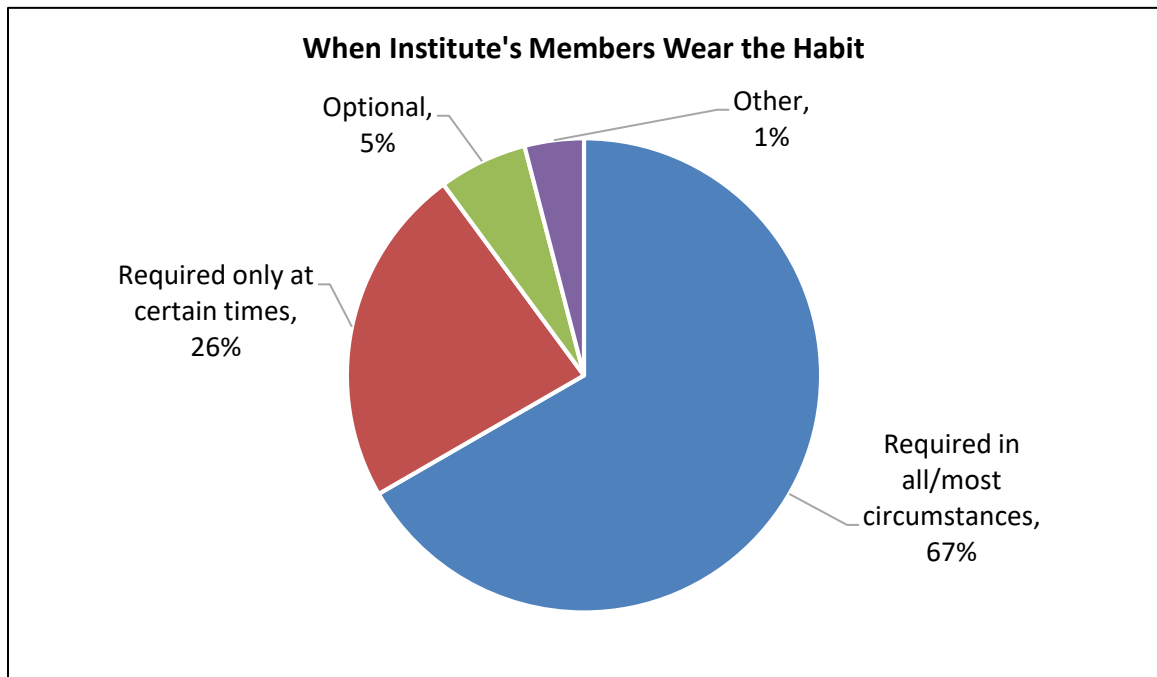


Wearing of Religious Habit

New entrants were asked if the members of their institute wear a habit. Just over seven in ten indicate that members of their institute wear a habit. Women are more likely than men to say that members of their institute wear a habit.

<i>Do members of your institute wear a habit?</i>			
Percentage responding "Yes" or "No"			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Yes	73	61	85
No	27	39	15

Among those who indicate that members wear a habit, two-thirds indicate that the habit is required in all or most circumstances (67%).



- A quarter reports that the habit is required only at certain times (26%). One in twenty (5%) reports that wearing habit is optional in their institute.

Comparisons by Gender

Women are more likely than men to say that wearing the habit is required in all or most all circumstances. Men, on the other hand, are more likely than women to say wearing the habit is required only at certain times or is optional.

<i>If yes, is wearing the habit:</i>			
Percentage responding			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Required in all or most circumstances	67	30	94
Required only at certain times	26	55	5
Optional	5	13	0
Other	1	2	1

Aspects of the Religious Institute

Nearly all respondents rate their religious institute as “good” or “excellent” in each of the aspects shown in the table below. Seven in ten or more report that their religious institute is “excellent” in these elements.

<i>How would you rate these in your religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Good” or “Excellent”	“Excellent” Only
	%	%
Commitment to ministry	96	75
Faithfulness to prayer and spiritual growth	96	75
Opportunities for personal growth	95	74
Opportunities for spiritual growth	95	75
Quality of community life	95	69
Relationships with one another	95	61

Just over nine in ten respondents indicate that the following elements are at least “good” in their institutes in each of the aspects in the table below. Six in ten or more say these elements are “excellent” in their institutes.

<i>How would you rate these in your religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Good” or “Excellent”	“Excellent” Only
	%	%
Focus on mission	94	65
Sense of identity as institute members	93	71
Welcome and support of newer members	93	77
Communal prayer experiences	92	64
Opportunities for ongoing formation	92	57
Response to the needs of our time	92	68

Nine in ten respondents rate their religious institute as “good” or “excellent” in each of the aspects in the table below.

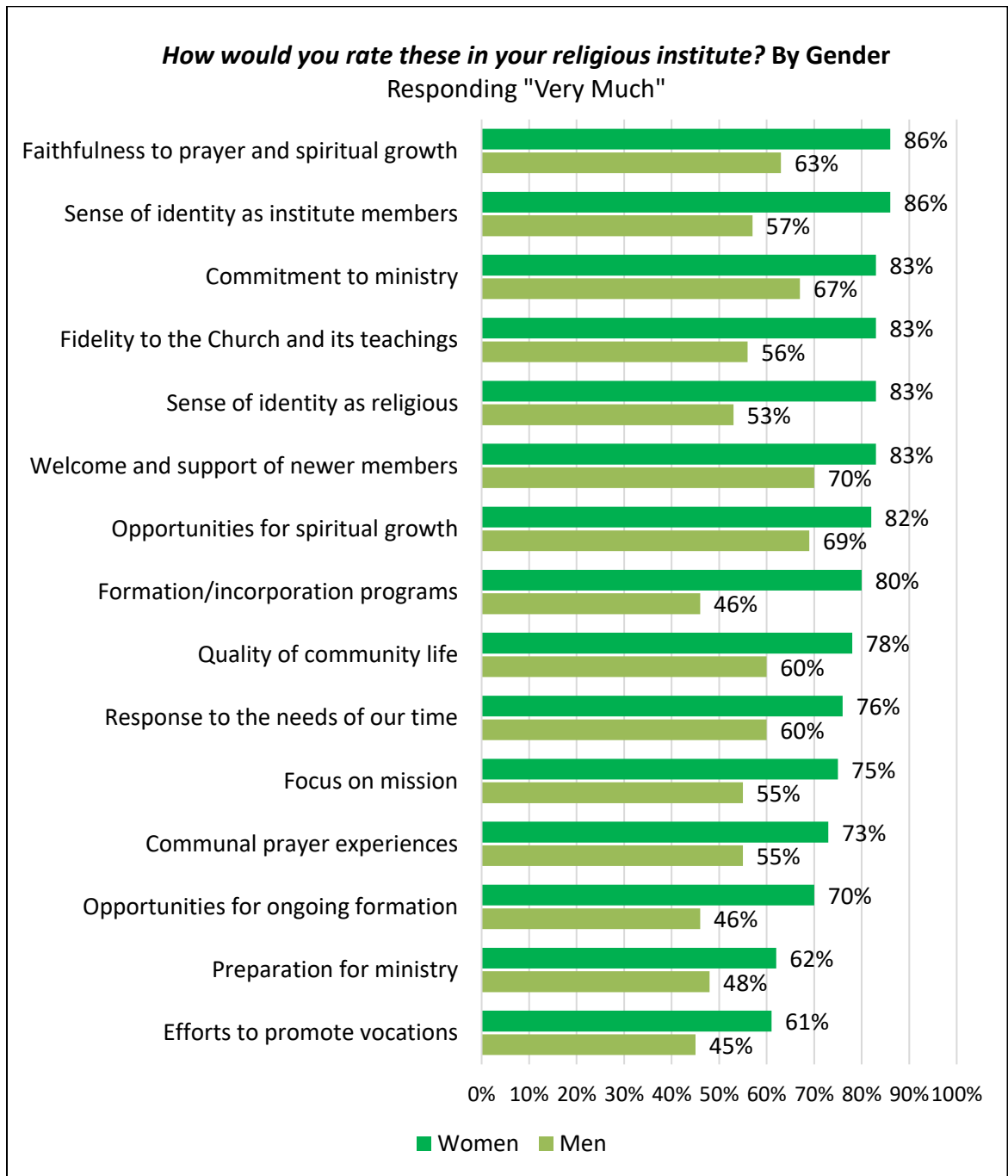
<i>How would you rate these in your religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Good” or “Excellent”	“Excellent” Only
	%	%
Educational opportunities	91	68
Formation/incorporation programs	91	63
Preparation for ministry	89	55
Fidelity to the Church and its teachings	88	69
Efforts to promote vocations	86	53

Eight in ten respondents rate efforts to promote social justice as “good” or “excellent”, with half sayings this element is excellent in their institute. Seven in ten rate diversity of cultures within the institute (72%) and sense of identity as religious (70%) as “good” or “excellent” in their institute.

<i>How would you rate these in your religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Good” or “Excellent”	“Excellent” Only
	%	%
Efforts to promote social justice	83	53
Diversity of cultures within the institute	72	43
Sense of identity as religious	70	68

Comparisons by Gender

Women are more likely than men to rate their religious institute as “excellent” on aspects mentioned in the chart below.



What Most Attracted You to Your Religious Institute?

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

Sense of Mission and Ministries of the Institutes

One of the common aspects that most attracted respondents to their religious institute is the sense of mission and ministry of the institute. Some of their responses include:

- *Focus on a relationship with Jesus and sharing that relationship with other people; the mission of evangelization especially through educational apostolates; interior prayer rooted in the Spiritual Exercises.*
- *I was most attracted to the missionary zeal in the members of my community; their relationship with and love for Jesus was evident to me, and it was clear that their love for souls was directed related to their own love for Jesus.*
- *Mission, diversity of missions and cultures, and as I experienced in the Mother House, daily prayer, daily mass, community living, diversity within the community. Promote care for all of creation.*
- *The example of the members whom I worked with prior to entering; the mission and various ministries of the institute.*
- *The sense of community and shared mission among the sisters. There was a deep care for each other that stretched across states and a shared life and purpose at the service of the Church and the world.*

Founder/Foundress, Spirituality, and Charism of the Institute

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

- *I love how much the [Name of institute] seem to know themselves, to be deeply rooted in the charism of their founder [Name of founder] and their mission to the youth. I love the joy and the gratitude they spread. I appreciate their commitment to communal life and the [Name of institute] family, which seems to me to be a healthy and holy foundation for a life of service.*
- *I was drawn to the [Name of institute] by their charism, the lives of their founder and patrons, and their joy.*
- *It was overall most attracted by the institute's spirituality, charism, and apostolate, and its desire and work to serve God and the Church through these.*
- *The application of religious life within the community, the charism, the mission and priority of education and formation, the vitality and youth of the Sisters, the involvement and accessibility of our founding Mothers.*
- *The [Name of institute] Charism as lived through the vision of religious life that our foundress initially instituted, which includes the prayer life, common life, apostolates, and essential elements of religious life as promoted by the [Name of institute].*

Prayer Life and Communal Prayer

Respondents also recognize prayer as other attractive aspects that drew them to their religious institute. They were attracted by the communal prayers and various types of prayers, including daily Mass, Liturgy of the Hours, Eucharistic Adoration, daily rosary, and the Stations of the Cross. Some of their responses about prayer included:

- *Strong prayer life, orthodox, strong foundation, and motivational community.*
- *The contemplative spirituality, monastic spirituality, Lectio Divina, silence, Liturgy of the Hours (sung), prayer life.*
- *The joy and enthusiasm of the Sisters The beautiful prayer life I felt at home with them. The fact that we are an active community, so I can be more of a witness to people.*
- *The most influential component to my discernment of this specific institute was the fact that they pray for 2 holy hours a day as a more active community. I also really appreciate the other opportunities for individual private prayer that my religious institute allows for. Lastly, I was really attracted to the charism and its relevance in the Church today.*

- *What most attracted me to the religious institute was the daily Eucharistic adoration and Marian devotion, specifically the dedication the institute has to the rosary and spreading the truth to the world as a teacher in their apostolate. The institute centers their daily lives on the liturgy and the Eucharist as well as personal and community prayer life. The beautiful sense of community the Sisters lived in also greatly attracted myself to the religious institute.*

Community Life

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

- *The charisma of making the merciful love visible, the prayer life, how important adoration is the community, the community life and how well the sisters loved each other but also those around them, and I really enjoy that they have many apostolates.*
- *The blend of contemplation and active lifestyle. Their joy, community life, and the faith, fidelity to the Pope mission to preach the gospel. Basically, the whole charism. I liked how their charism was so noticeable, and you could see their closeness with God.*
- *The community life and the charism of educating in the faith.*
- *I was attracted to our community's faithful way of living [Name of institute] life; the joy which stems from that and the joy which our Sisters give to every part of their life - a joy deeply rooted in love for Christ. Their fidelity to the Church and religious identity also attracted me, as well as our wearing of a religious habit and sharing a common life. Two other factors were our devotion to the Holy Eucharist and Our Lady.*
- *The vocation of living in community, serving the community and growing closer to Christ all in one lifestyle is what drew me into religious life.*

Joy of the Institute's Members

In addition, respondents were attracted to their religious institute by the joy of the members and their encounter with them. Some of their responses include:

- *I was most attracted to the deep and intimate relationships that each member of the religious institute had with the person of Jesus Christ. They all had very mature, but also very varied experiences of Jesus that allows them to live in community with one another and serve Christ in the world. This was a stark difference to the parish priests I knew growing up who seemed to be more focused on a cookie-cutter type of Catholicism that*

necessitated certain universal propositions about Christ rather than allowing for Jesus to have individualized relationship with each of his beloved children.

- *How they love! The charism is not one of life, but truly each sister loves deeply the person they encounter that really moved me. The prayer life dedication to the Eucharist and formation at a person was something that drew me to the community and joy: The Sisters are so joyful and deeply happy. They know who they are in the eyes of God, and they want others to know of the love God has for them too.*
- *I became friends with members in the order and couldn't shake the question why not me? Why can't I do this?*
- *I just felt at home with the members. I felt like I shared the same spirit, and I loved it most of all because God made it abundantly clear that He wanted me here.*
- *I was attracted to the sisters' humility, their commitment to social justice, and their genuine love for each other and for the poor, and their willingness to suffer for that love.*

Religious habit

- *What most attracted me to my religious institute was their pure joy. Every Sister was extremely kind and in love with God. This struck me along with their habit, and their devotion to both the Eucharist and Mary. All of these aspects were very important to me and filled me with excitement when I thought about them. I do not think that any other community would be able to fill me so much as ours does. God knew exactly where he wanted me.*
- *Changing of divine office, religious habit, community life and fidelity to magisterium of the Church.*
- *The centrality of Christ; commitment to wearing the full habit, common liturgical life, fidelity to Rome/Church teachings; common ethnicity to me. Also very impressed by their formation program (thorough discernment process, healthy accompaniment, and the emphasis is on discovering God's will, not about "boosting numbers" for the Order.*
- *The spirituality, apostolate and habit all equally attracted me.*
- *Wearing of the religious habit, faithfulness to the Catholic Church, Eucharistic reverence, charisma, and the example of the sisters I met and their joy.*

Fidelity to the Church

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

- *Service to the Vietnamese community. Fidelity to the Church, religious habit. Charism of preaching for the salvation of souls.*
- *The Charism, their fidelity to the Church and the relevance and urgency to respond to the needs of our times.*
- *Daily Eucharistic Adoration, Marian devotions, fidelity to Traditional Catholicism, young members, rapidly growing, apostolate of by preaching and teaching, love for life by members.*
- *Faithfulness to Church teaching, fraternity, and evangelization.*
- *I was most attracted to the order because of their strict following of the Church's teachings on religious life accompanied by their emphasis on New Evangelization. healthy human formation and the youthfulness of my order.*

What Do You Find Most Challenging about Religious Life?

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

Community Life

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

- *Thus far, I find community living to be the most challenging. I am learning to be in a peer, sister relationship with women who are decades older than me. I am learning to communicate and share of myself in new ways. It is all good, but it is challenging.*
- *The communal life. Loving one neighbor sounds easy, until you live and prayer with them 24/7 and always trying to be charitable, wishing them the best. It's a big growth in humility and love.*
- *Living with members who confuse/have infused politics and religion together. Especially here in during this tumultuous political season.*
- *Living with 70 other women, ranging in age from 27 to 103, with very different personalities and emotional competence levels is often a challenge! Also coming from another country (Australia) which is 10,000 miles away, has a different dialect and much warmer weather is also a challenge at times!*
- *Living in community. It's the one of the most beautiful parts of religious life, but also a very big area of growth for me. Especially as an introvert, balancing time with others and growing in friendships but also knowing what I need.*

Vows

Respondents most commonly report that they find religious vows the most challenging aspect of their religious life experience. They have learned that living the three vows requires relinquishing the luxurious life they were used to lead. Some of their responses include:

- *Chastity and community life (though I love it, it can be really tough).*

- *The vows, specifically the vow of chastity.*
- *The vow of obedience, restrictions on travel, and living in accordance with the community schedule.*
- *I find it most challenging to be faithful and recollectedness in living the vows every moment throughout the day.*
- *The commitment to obedience and following a collective formation program - not being able to choose what you do, when you do it and how you do it.*

Maturing in Religious Life

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

- *Learning to be vulnerable and move past a rather difficult family life into the freedom of living in a community steeped in unconditional love.*
- *Adjusting from old ways, habits, and customs had in the lay life and learning to fully adopt and take on the new and more challenging ones of the community to be able to die to self and live a life fully devoted to God.*
- *What I find most challenging about religious life is learning how to love myself and know my identity as a daughter of God. This is something that was difficult for me before entering, but now have entered, it is a beautiful door that is being opened to me. While, yes, it is challenging recognizing all my in ordered ways and thoughts, it is beautiful and freeing being able to grow here, allowing me to grow in closer union with God.*
- *I find it most challenging to not compare myself to other members in the institute. This comparing keeps me from seeing what God wants me to see in myself, others, and His will for my daily life.*
- *Every day I become more aware of my poverty, weakness, and need for God's love and mercy. In these first 2 months, the most challenging part of religious life has been letting myself be poor, weak, broken, and needing and not relying on my own strength (self-reliance) but allowing the Gospel to be sung through the witness of my life through a converting life of letting myself be loved and forgiven. There is no hiding.*

Adaptation to Religious Life

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

- *Learning the way of life, customs of the community, and adjusting/ the transition to religious life from secular life.*
- *Adapting to religious/community life, learning/keeping track with various responsibilities in community life.*
- *The balance between study and community time. Sometimes, we are so busy with study life that I kind of felt the lack of community bonding.*
- *It was difficult for me to adapt to community life. I was used to being surrounded by extroverts in college; most of the men in formation are introverts, and I was uncomfortable with silence. Luckily, I adapted practical and personal conversation, as well as simple patience over time.*
- *The transition from being immersed in the world/culture of the world and going to live such a hidden life. But that exact thing invites trust in God and deep spiritual growth.*

Decreasing Communication with Family and Friends

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

- *The most challenging thing for me is the adjustment of not being in as much contact with my friends and old community. This has gotten easier with time but remains a great sorrow in leaving everything behind to pursue the Lord with my entire heart.*
- *The most challenging aspects are separation from family, a sense of loss of independence, the call to obedience, the intense human formation, and the adjustment to inter-generational community.*
- *So far in my Postulant year, I have found the feeling of separation the most challenging: a sense of alienation from some friends especially who now view me very differently. It is*

also a struggle to reconcile some of my past friendships because I realize that the basis of these friendships is not as solid as I had thought. In summary, I think the entrance into religious life makes the divides that I feel between myself and others come out more harshly than before.

- *Life in a monastery is much more rigorous than I was used to- less sleep, food and more physical labor, the life is not easy. Being away from family, friends, home and not leaving the enclosure, so can't go back for visits. You cannot do or go whatever/ wherever you want, or buy whatever you want/need. Adjustment takes time and giving up marriage and family.*
- *First, missing my family has been an extreme cross to bear, as I was very close to them, and this is my first time away, plus communication is limited now. Second, the adjustment to a life of sacrifice and renunciation of the world. I think for young women coming from our modern world today, including me, it is hard to readjust and adapt to a life of poverty, and obedience as well, with fewer comforts, convenience, and such. Sometimes, it's also the little things, like struggles in prayer, community life on a particular day, not feeling well, and so on. Also, there is a lot to learn at first it can be overwhelming. Yet, it is such a beautiful gift and joy every day despite the challenges.*

Other Challenges

Other types of challenges that respondents found in responding to the new life style in their religious communities include:

- *Being open to serve others and not oneself.*
- *Confidence in myself.*
- *Finding the supernatural sense in the most ordinary days of our lives.*
- *Having to stop and ask for permission instead of seeing something needs to be done and doing it right away.*
- *I find it challenging to rely so much on others in the community and on God. I was very much in control of the world. I have had to learn to let things go and do not know everything all at once. In essence, my perfectionism must be broken down and this is what I struggle against the most. I am constantly reminded that I am finite.*
- *I find it deeply painful to be affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church and its oppressive teachings.*
- *In the time of Covid-19, the most challenging aspect of religious life has been the limitations we face as a community. Because we are an apostolic body, we serve in*

the community several times a week. This means that we have to observe safety protocols in the house together, including sitting and eating 6-feet apart, not singing during Mass, and limiting the time we spend in large group settings. This has been a challenge for all members of our community.

- *Interpersonal dynamics though not confined to religious life.*
- *Living in a situation where so little of the enormous potential of the life is realized. especially in regards to liturgy and common life.*
- *The age difference between myself and most of the members.*
- *The decline in membership, and an insistence on including a prominent amount of “progressive thinking” instead of Catholic theology.*
- *The different points of views people follow.*
- *The tension of what our mission is in the 21st century (social justice or evangelization or both, etc)*

Appendix I: Questionnaire with Response Frequencies

- 7 23. Through an event sponsored by the institute
- 7 24. Through a media story about the institute or member
- 32 25. Through your own search
- 3 26. Through print promotional materials
- 14 27. Through web or social media promotional materials
- 17 28. Other: _____

Please use the responses below for questions 29-41.

1=Not at All Helpful 3=Somewhat Helpful
2=Only a Little Helpful 4=Very Helpful
5=Not Applicable/Did not participate

Please choose "5" if you did not participate. If you participated in any of the following **with your religious institute** before you entered, how helpful were these to you in discerning your call to **your institute**?

1	2	3	4	5	NR	
2	3	13	78	3	1	29. Contact with the vocation director
2	4	16	69	10	1	30. Contact with institute members
6	2	2	4	88	2	31. "Andrew Dinner" or "Nun Run"
2	2	11	66	20	2	32. "Come and See" experience
3	2	13	57	27	3	33. Vocation or discernment retreat
3	1	8	39	50	1	34. Live-in experience
3	2	12	26	56	1	35. Ministry with institute members
3	2	8	15	72	2	36. Mission experience
5	6	9	17	64	2	37. Meeting with a discernment group
2	5	15	44	34	1	38. Visit(s) to local community/ies
5	2	8	42	45	2	39. Visit(s) to the Motherhouse
11	12	20	19	38	1	40. Social media (e.g., Facebook)
2	7	12	52	27	1	41. Spiritual direction

Please use the responses below for questions 42-54.

1=Not at All 3=Somewhat
2=Only a Little 4=Very Much

How much did these influence your decision to enter **your religious institute**?

1	2	3	4	NR	
28	22	36	14	1	42. The size of the institute
32	18	29	21	2	43. Its geographic location(s)
43	14	23	20	7	44. Its internationality, if applicable
3	8	21	67	1	45. Prayer life or prayer styles in the institute
2	4	22	72	1	46. Community life in the institute
4	9	26	61	2	47. The lifestyle of members
57	17	15	11	4	48. The racial/ethnic background of members

23	22	32	23	3	49.	The ages of members
5	10	30	56	2	50.	The types of ministry of its members
20	12	15	53	2	51.	Its practice regarding a religious habit
2	4	17	78	2	52.	The Charism of the institute
46	22	15	17	4	53.	The cultural diversity of the members
14	20	26	40	3	54.	The focus on the possibilities for the future of the institute

Please use the responses below for questions 55-67.

1=Not at All 2=Only a Little 3=Somewhat Important 4=Very Important

How important to you are these types of prayer?

1	2	3	4	NR	
0	1	8	91	1	55. Private personal prayer
2	2	12	85	1	56. Daily Eucharist
2	9	22	68	2	57. Liturgy of the Hours
8	29	36	28	2	68. Non-liturgical common prayer
16	19	28	37	3	59. Common meditation
3	7	18	73	2	60. Eucharistic Adoration
5	12	28	56	2	61. Other devotional prayer, e.g., rosary
10	16	35	39	3	62. Faith sharing

How important to you are these aspects of community life?

1	2	3	4	NR	
1	4	11	85	1	63. Living with other members
2	3	11	85	1	64. Praying with other members
1	6	23	70	2	65. Working with other members
2	3	17	78	1	66. Sharing meals together
2	5	14	79	1	67. Socializing/sharing leisure time together

Please use the responses below for questions 68-87.

1=Poor 2=Fair 3=Good 4=Excellent

How would you rate these in your religious institute?

1	2	3	4	NR	
3	12	33	53	5	68. Efforts to promote vocations
1	7	16	77	4	69. Welcome and support of newer members
1	9	28	63	6	70. Formation/incorporation programs
1	7	35	57	6	71. Opportunities for ongoing formation
2	7	23	68	6	72. Educational opportunities
1	11	34	55	7	73. Preparation for ministry
1	4	20	75	4	74. Opportunities for spiritual growth
0	5	21	74	4	75. Opportunities for personal growth
2	7	2	68	4	76. Sense of identity as religious

2	5	22	71	5	77.	Sense of identity as institute members
5	7	19	69	4	78	Fidelity to the Church and its teachings
1	4	21	75	4	79.	Faithfulness to prayer and spiritual growth
1	6	29	65	4	80.	Focus on mission
1	4	21	75	6	81.	Commitment to ministry
2	6	24	68	4	82	Response to the needs of our time
3	14	30	53	8	83.	Efforts to promote social justice
1	5	26	69	4	84	Quality of community life
2	7	28	64	4	85.	Communal prayer experiences
1	4	34	61	4	86.	Relationships with one another
11	17	29	43	4	87.	Diversity of cultures within the institute

Yes No

73 27 88. Do members of your institute wear a habit? N = 2

88a. *If yes to #88, is wearing the habit* NR = 28

67 Required in all or most circumstances

26 Required only at certain times, e.g., ministry, prayer

5 Optional

1 Other: _____

88b. *If yes to #88, and wearing the habit is optional, how many members wear it all or most of the time?* N = 96

50 None

25 A few (less than 25%)

13 Some (25-49%)

13 Many (50-74%)

0 Most (75% or more)

88c. *If yes to #88, and wearing the habit is optional, how frequently do you wear it?* N = 96

50 Never

0 Once in a while

25 Only at certain times (e.g., ministry, prayer)

25 In all or most circumstances

About You

_____ 89. Year you were born

_____ 90. Age you first considered religious life

_____ 91. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

92. What is your birth order? N = 1

4. Only child 27. Youngest

32. Eldest 37. Somewhere in the middle

93. Are you: 51. Male 49. Female

93a. *If male*, do you expect become a
28. Perpetually professed brother
72. Priest

94. What is your first language? _____

95. How many languages do you speak fluently?
70. One 24. Two 5. Three 2. Four or more

Yes No

83 17 96. Were you employed before you entered? N = 2
96a. *If yes to #96*, were you employed? N = 19
69. Full-time 31. Part-time

60 40 97. Were you in ministry before you entered? N = 2
97a. *If yes to #97*, were you engaged in ministry? N = 41
28. Full-time 18. Part-time 53. Volunteer

98. What best describes your racial or ethnic background?
3. African/African American/black
15. Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian
63. Caucasian/European American/white
12. Hispanic/Latino(a)
1. Native American/American Indian
3. Mixed race
4. Other: _____

Yes No NR

77 23 2 99. Were you born in the United States?
99a. *If no to #99*, country of birth:

_____ 99b. *If no*, year you first moved to United States
91 9 1 100. Were you raised Catholic?

100a. *If no to #100*, did you become Catholic through the Rite of
Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)?

100b. *If no to #100*, what was your prior religious affiliation:

12 88 5 101. Were you ever home-schooled?

101a. *If yes to #101*, number of years home-schooled

Did you attend any of the following before you entered? *Check all that apply.*

52 102. Parish-based religious education/CCD/PSR

45 103. Catholic elementary or middle school

38 104. Catholic high school

38 105. Catholic college or university

21 106. Catholic ministry formation program

Aside from parish-based religious education, did you ever participate in any of these before you entered? *Check all that apply.*

- 40 107. Parish youth group or Life Teen during elementary or middle school years
- 27 108. Campus ministry during high school years
- 43 109. Parish young adult group
- 50 110. Campus ministry during college
- 13 111. Religious institute volunteer program (e.g., Mercy Corps or Jesuit Volunteer Corps)
- 63 112. Liturgical ministry (e.g., lector, extraordinary minister)
- 43 113. Music ministry, cantor, choir
- 40 114. Faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA team
- 55 115. Other volunteer work in a parish or other setting
- 74 116. Retreats
- 12 117. World Youth Day
- 6 118. National Catholic Youth Conference
- 36 119. Right to Life March in Washington, DC

120. What was the highest level of education you completed before you entered your religious institute? N = 1

- 11. High school or less
- 12. Some college
- 54. Bachelor's degree
- 18. Master's degree
- 3. Doctoral degree
- 2. Other: _____

Family Background While You Were Growing Up

Yes No NR

- 90 10 1 121. Was your mother Catholic?
- 121a. *If no*, what was her religious preference?

122. How important was religion to your mother while you were growing up? N = 3

- 1. Not at all
- 10. Only a little
- 26. Somewhat important
- 64. Very important

- 85 15 1 123. Was your father Catholic?
- 123a. *If no*, what was his religious preference?

124. How important was religion to your father while you were growing up? N = 2

- 9. Not at all
- 16. Only a little
- 30. Somewhat important
- 46. Very important

- 31 69 2 125. Do (did) you have a relative who is a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun?

- 66 34 2 126. Outside of family members, while you were growing up did you ever get to know a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun?

- 28 72 2 127. Did your mother ever speak to you about a vocation to priesthood or religious life?
- 18 82 2 128. Did your father ever speak to you about a vocation to priesthood or religious life?
- 29 71 2 129. Did another family member ever speak to you about a vocation to priesthood or religious life?
- 51 49 2 130. Overall, was starting a discussion with your family about your vocation easy for you?

Please use these responses for questions 131-142.

1=Not at All 2=Only a Little 3=Somewhat 4=Very Much
BLANK=Not applicable

How much encouragement did you receive from these when you first considered entering a religious institute?

1	2	3	4	NR		
3	4	19	74	4	131.	Members of your institute
3	5	15	77	8	132.	Vocation director/team
4	3	17	76	18	133.	Spiritual director, if applicable
14	10	21	56	17	134.	Other men and women religious
9	14	22	55	13	135.	Diocesan priests
15	16	25	44	7	136.	Your parents, if applicable
16	27	27	31	11	137.	Your siblings, if applicable
17	24	29	30	16	138.	Other family members
3	13	23	51	16	139.	People in your parish
14	12	27	46	14	140.	People in your school or workplace
34	6	16	44	49	141.	Campus minister, if applicable
7	10	26	57	6	142.	Friends outside the institute

143. What most attracted you to your religious institute?

144. What do you find most challenging about religious life?

Appendix II: Responses to Open-ended Comments

Q. 143: What most attracted you to your religious institute?

Presented here are the responses of the new entrants, slightly edited. These are:

A friend told me that I can make a good SDB Charism of the SDB Serving the young who are the Church of tomorrow Community life and prayer Holiness and the life of Don. Bosco

After starting to become more open to explore the possibility of religious life, this was the only community that I saw myself being a part of. When I visited, the small parts of the daily life was what attracted me the most. they seemed life the exact way the Lord was asking me to love Him and become the most fulfilled and natural version of myself. The joy in every sister here is so evident because they are authentically themselves.

As a Benedictine, I was most attracted to the integrated way of life that is lived at my monastery. The balance between ora et labora where there is (in a very tangible way) no dichotomy between my work and my prayer. My community does an excellent job between what we do around the altar and what we do outside of the church. The discipline of the horarium lends itself to a congruent life.

Being a missionary and work with people from different backgrounds

Being a prophetic witness, especially around the role and value of women in the Church.

Changing of divine office, religious habit, community life and fidelity to magisterium of the Church.

Charism of CSJ " Serve the dear Neighbor and Reconciliation"

Commitment and devotion to the truth, one of the "old" orders; church history, close to family- they can visit me, full habit, lots of young sisters, beautiful and reverent mass, joyful, caring and fun sisters, exposition to the Blessed Sacrament all day, full office chanted in common, silence and plenty of time for prayer, traditional outlook, balance of life, devotion to Our Lady, life of study- we grow in our knowledge of God, the entire Dominican order is connected- the friars, nuns and sisters.

Community and prayer life

Community and prayer were the main focus. I also just felt God pushing me to come here. Not all because of community and prayer, but rather something God wanted me to do. As I started taking part in the formation programs, I realized more of why God wanted me to come and it didn't all have to do with community and prayer. Community and prayer did attract me, but there were other reasons that I couldn't explain that drew me to the order. I think this is just an example of the Holy Spirit drawing me closer to the abbey and me listening to the movements of God on my heart.

Community life well-lived

Community life, the evangelical counsels, Ignatian spirituality, and a desire to grow closer to Jesus

Community serving God amongst brothers

Contemplative aspects.

contemplative life

Daily Eucharistic Adoration, Marian devotions, fidelity to Traditional Catholicism, young members, rapidly growing, apostolate of by preaching and teaching, love for life by members.

Diversity and interculturality and mission

Dominican Tradition; the centrality of Christ; commitment to wearing the full habit, common liturgical life, fidelity to Rome/Church teachings; common ethnicity to me. Also, very impressed by their formation program (thorough discernment process, healthy accompaniment, and the emphasis is on discovering God's will, not about "boosting numbers" for the Order.

Example of Padre Pio and Saint Francis

Faithfulness to Church teaching, fraternity, and evangelization.

felt called and wanted to honor God

First, I was attracted by meeting members of my institute. Then, as I felt even more called, I was drawn by their Dominican charism with special emphasis on Mary and the Eucharist, and their strong identity as religious. I loved their habit, their evangelization through it, and through their apostolate. So much about them, their life, and their work spoke to me so much. I knew they were "it" once I met them and looked into them deeper.

Focus on a relationship with Jesus and sharing that relationship with other people; the mission of evangelization especially through educational apostolates; interior prayer rooted in the Spiritual Exercises.

Focus on truth and study.

For me, that is the apostolic life and missionary.

Fraternal life, spirituality of the institute and the life of prayer.

God

God- He chose this order for me. It's where He wishes for me to be. Traditional/Authentic.

Going against the grain" of this noisy and numbing world. A constant feeling of disappointment with everything the world told me I was going to be happy with (i.e. engineering degree and job with NASA, material possessions, popularity and business connections, a fiancé, etc.). Finally, the call to sanctity and following the command of Jesus to preach the Gospel.

Growing in holiness

Growth

Having been in the diocesan seminary for two years (completing the Pre-Theology Program), I was drawn to the Dominican Order. This was primarily due to an inner conviction I realized in prayer, and confirmed in Spiritual Direction, to give myself to Christ entirely through the profession of vows. I was also drawn to the aspects of living in community, engaging in life-long study, and being able to preach and teach in service of the Church.

How it connected to my discernment process (Saints connected to the order, our lady's important/influence), the sisters themselves, feeling like I could be myself, feeling the sense of belonging/at home there. The joy I experienced while visiting, inspirations in prayer, and graces received a retreat and later on. How the order, and this specific congregation seemed to align with all that God had been pointing out/leading us over the years.

How they love! The charism is not one of life, but truly each sister loves deeply the person they encounter that really moved me. The prayer life dedication to the Eucharist and formation at a person was something that drew me to the community and joy: The Sisters are so joyful and deeply happy. They know who they are in the eyes of God, and they want others to know of the love God has for them too!

How young the Sisters are and how much our community is growing. Along with their youthfulness, their joy in living their vocation and living it well. I was also attracted to the fact that their apostolate makes it possible for young women like myself to not only witness them living out their vocation but also have a discussion about my own vocation. In other words, they are very involved with the youth of the Church.

I became friends with members in the order and couldn't shake the question why not me? Why can't I do this?

I could feel Our Lady's love through them, how they served with an undivided heart, all vocations serving for one mission with the Marian Trinitarian spirituality in areas of deepest apostolic need.

I felt strongly about living a life on the social margins and close to the earth, outside the grip of materialism and consumerism, letting God and people take center stage. This is something I intuited during experiences on service trips and spending time among the poor. There's no division among the disenfranchised in terms of some of pride, social class, individualism. Franciscan Sister Jose Hobday writes on the nature of simple living: "(it is) about choosing time for people and ideas and self-growth rather than for maintenance and guarding and possessing and cleaning."

I felt that the Jesuits was the place I could best live out my deepest desires, living faith both internally and externally. This meant a deep prayer life, a life of active service and justice, life in community, and the chance to live poverty and simplicity.

I just felt at home with the members. I felt like I shared the same spirit, and I loved it most of all because God made it abundantly clear that He wanted me here.

I love how much the Salesians seem to know themselves, to be deeply rooted in the charism of their founder St. John Bosco and their mission to the youth. I love the joy and the

gratitude they spread. I appreciate their commitment to communal life and the Salesian family, which seems to me to be a healthy and holy foundation for a life of service. I am attracted to the Salesian love for the Eucharist, their commitment to Mary as mother and help, and the life of daily prayer that grounds the whole institute. I also love missionary dimension of the order, the recognition of the preferential option for the poor internationally, and their evangelization based in loving accompaniment. I am animated by their mission to the salvation of souls of the youth because I believe that it responds to a real need in the Church.

I loved the emphasis on consecration to, and living in union with, the Blessed Virgin Mary; I loved the reverence for the liturgy and tradition of the Church (though I also appreciate charismatic spirituality when it is practiced with an attitude of respect and obedience towards the Magisterium and the hierarchy); I loved the genuine joyfulness and kindness of these sisters; I loved the reverence and devotion offered to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist; most of all, I loved the profound understanding of what it means to be a bride of Jesus Christ, the Divine Bridegroom. He is my Beloved, and so it was essential to find a community that would help me be, as much as possible, a worthy spouse for Him.

I myself am inspired to live the life of Saint Francis of Assisi and how he chose to live his life as Christ like in his own way by renouncing all worldly desires, by choosing to be poor, serving the poor, preaching the Gospels by his works and his examples, and being a peacemaker. The love St. Francis had for all God's creation.

I never grew up around Sisters, and really never came to know any personally until I was a focus missionary. Sisters from several orders come to visit our summer training, and I think that when I first became attracted to religious life. I love hearing the Sister's vocation stories, realizing they were all really amazing women and I could actually relate to them. Sisters from the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration came to visit the campus I served at as a focus missionary-Ball State. I first got to know one of the sisters; Sr. Benedicta, through a one-on-one conversation about life, prayer, and vocational discernment. I was invited to one of their discernment retreats when I was first really opening my heart of feeling a tug from the Lord to consider religious life. I was so struck by the joy of all the Sisters on the retreat, their stories, their Franciscan Charism, and Perpetual Adoration. I kept feeling this call from Jesus to keep visiting and eventually enter. I received encouragement from the community and really just felt at home and received by the Lord and the community.

I started to see the memories of my lay missionary experience with the religious institute. I also began to hear a song of the founding Saint spontaneously.

I was attracted to our community's faithful way of living Dominican life; the joy which stems from that and the joy which our Sisters give to every part of their life - a joy deeply rooted in love for Christ. Their fidelity to the Church and religious identity also attracted me, as well as our wearing of a religious habit and sharing a common life. Two other factors were our devotion to the Holy Eucharist and Our Lady.

I was attracted to the sisters' humility, their commitment to social justice, and their genuine love for each other and for the poor, and their willingness to suffer for that love.

I was attracted to the witness that many of the young temporarily professed religious had of the Gospel and the mission of the Congregation of Holy Cross. I also could tell that the order was healthy by the active vocation's office and the energy that the formators and the seminarians had. I was somewhat familiar with the order since my high school was founded by it, but I still did not know much about the order until talking with vocations at their NCYC booth.

I was drawn to the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia by their charism, the lives of their founder and patrons, and their joy!

I was first attracted to the vibrancy and joy of my religious institute. I was attracted to how so many young women were taking the radical step of surrendering their whole lives to Jesus and were so joyful as a result. They are more fully alive than most people today because of the way in which they fully and deeply engage each moment of each day.

I was going to mass every day and praying as much as u could, but it wasn't enough. I yearned to be a contemplative nun so that I could pray without ceasing. There was a Carmelite monastery just 20 minutes from my apartment, so I decided to see if I could meet with a nun. I didn't know anything about the Carmelite order, but it was a convenient place to start. The first time I met with Mother Thérèse (the prioires/ vocation director.) I asked how she chose the Carmelite over the contemplative orders. She replied, "If you want prayer, you have to go to Carmelite." I thought, "There is no better reason than that!" Once I started visiting, it was obvious God was calling me here. I think everything is outstanding- the prayer life, community etc.

I was most attracted by the joy of the sisters I had encountered. I also appreciated how active they were while still maintaining a deep sense of prayerfulness and connection to the Holy Spirit.

I was most attracted to the deep and intimate relationships that each member of the religious institute had with the person of Jesus Christ. They all had very mature, but also very varied experiences of Jesus that allows them to live in community with one another and serve Christ in the world. This was a stark difference to the parish priests I knew growing up who seemed to be more focused on a cookie-cutter type of Catholicism that necessitated certain universal propositions about Christ rather than allowing for Jesus to have individualized relationship with each of his beloved children.

I was most attracted to the missionary zeal in the members of my community; their relationship with and love for Jesus was evident to me, and it was clear that their love for souls was directed related to their own love for Jesus.

I was most attracted to the order because of their strict following of the Church's teachings on religious life accompanied by their emphasis on New Evangelization healthy human formation and the youthfulness of my order. * Vatican # Documents

I'm still not exactly sure myself; if I had to say, it would be that the overall condition here shows itself to be distinct from "the world", creating a place for true focus and growth on God.

Ignatian Spirituality

Interacting with the sisters themselves. Experiencing their openness, inclusiveness, caring, understanding, wisdom and their joy of life.

It feels like home. It is where my heart will rest in the Sacred Heart to be transformed and recreated as His beloved child and bride. During my discernment entering this religious institute was simple and easy.

It is the authentic living of religious life, faithfulness to the Magisterium, and the intentional and strong commitment to prayer.

It was overall most attracted by the institute's spirituality, charism, and apostolate, and its desire and work to serve God and the Church through these.

It was primarily a sense of God calling me here. I had a very strong sense when I visited, and I would say I knew I had a vocation here before I even know very much about the community. I did know I was very drawn to the Dominican charism, and it is expressed beautifully here in the prayer, ministry and community life of the congregation.

Its spirituality and the opportunities for education, ministry, and formation that come with its size and international reach.

Its Charism and their apostolate. To contemplate and share with others the fruits of our contemplation. To praise, to bless, and to preach. I love that it has a clear mission towards what the New Evangelization requires. Teaching younger generations about God is fundamental. I was a Dominican at heart before entering.

Its engagement with the culture in direct ways, its vibrant growth of younger members, and its diversity of missions to be engaged with.

Jesus's infinite love and Our Lady's own love and goodness, manifest in the members of our Congregation.

Living in a dormitory with two priests of the religious institute was an opportunity for me to learn directly and indirectly about my religious institute. The joyful and holy example those two men set every moment I encountered them really set my heart on fire. The focus on community life was also really critical for me, as I have always been in a community of some sort since I started in Scouting in sixth grade.

Love for the Eucharist and Mama Mary. Focus on catechism and teaching young people. Habited sisters (mostly) some sisters cannot wear the habit in other parts of the world.

Love for the orthodox faith.

Love of animals and outdoors. Serving the poor

Many aspects of my community attracted me, especially our devotion to Mary and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. I was also very drawn to the way that my community

lives out their Dominican vocation and truly holds up prayer and the contemplative life as primary. Out of this personal relationship flows their apostolate. I also loved that they wore the full habit and veils as a sign and witnesses to the world of their consecration to Christ.

Meeting the Sisters and witnessing their joy really attracted me to this institute. Their joy communicated God's love and showed me that giving their lives to God was not a waste, but instead the greatest gift. Then I learned more about the institute and after knowledge followed love.

Ministries

Mission, diversity of missions and cultures, and as I experienced in the Mother House, daily prayer, daily mass, community living, diversity within the community. Promote care for all of creation.

Most monasteries had an age limit which prohibited me from entering. The monastery I entered allowed older men to enter.

Multiple annual week-long silent retreats with my Father over 5 yr period.

My vocation director

Our charism and how our sisters attended to each other.

Our devotions, Liturgies, and the frequency of the Sacraments attracted me the most, especially since it is centered on Mary and Jesus in the Eucharist, flowing into all parts of our lives as Dominican Sisters.

Over 800 plus years of history and tradition. Knowing that I am following in the footsteps of many wonderful and talented people that gave up their old way of life just to follow Jesus and St. Dominic's teaching. The immaculate white habits and rosary. The overall dedication of the priest and brothers within the communities.

Particular aspects of their prayer & spirituality; the eager welcome from members; the good & healthy relationships/communication between members; the presence of younger sisters; the acceptance of diversity; and the balance between prayer, ministry, and rest.

POVERTY, EVANGELIZATION AND SERVICE TO THE POOR/THOSE IN NEED

prayer and activities

prayer life and missionaries work

Prayer, sacrifice, and love drew me to Church.

Praying by singing.

Praying the divine office in community.

Preaching apostolate, faithfulness to tradition

Seeking it make the merciful love of Christ visible. Traditional, in line with the church, real, unique, striving for holiness and the Sisters.

Sense of community with ministry with the sisters

Service to the Vietnamese community. Fidelity to the Church, religious habit. Charism of preaching for the salvation of souls.

Serving God as a Jesuit; living my Catholic faith in a modern way.

simplicity, joy, and charism/ spirituality

Strong prayer life, orthodox, strong foundation, and motivational community.

That is a religious Institute pool of love for Christ in the church's teachings. They take their call very seriously and with love. Holiness here is not an option but a must. Also, a strong sense of fraternity.

The application of religious life within the community, the charism, the mission and priority of education and formation, the vitality and youth of the Sisters, the involvement and accessibility of our founding Mothers

The balance of community life and prayer is what first attracted me to the order

the balance of life

The beauty well-roundedness and joy of its members. The authenticity of their prayer and themselves. The serving/servant element of their charism.

The Benedictine Charism and friends in the institute.

The blend of contemplation and active lifestyle. Their joy, community life, and the faith, fidelity to the Pope mission to preach the gospel. Basically, the whole charism. I liked how their charism was so noticeable, and you could see their closeness with God.

The call to intimate friendship with Jesus

The central mission and the brotherhood

The charism of educating in faith.

The charism of monastic life as being centered on seeking God in prayer and life in community.

The charism of our order.

The Charism of suffering with Jesus Crucified and of making His merciful life as exemplified in the Cross known to the world through a quiet life of hidden prayer. Also, the simple joy and faith of the sisters.

The Charism of the community. The joy of the members of the community. The emphasis on Eucharistic spirituality. The fact that Jesus met me in prayer very strongly when I visited the community. The freedom I experienced through the discernment process and the deep respect the vocation director had to respecting my freedom and discerning the Holy Spirit presence.

The Charism, joy from its members and love of the faith and how many young women there were.

The Charism, their fidelity to the Church and the relevance and urgency to respond to the needs of our times.

The Charism.

The charisma of making the merciful love visible, the prayer life, how important adoration is the community, the community life and how well the sisters loved each other but also those around them, and I really enjoy that they have many apostolates.

The Chrism and their spirituality.

The community life and the charism of educating in the faith

The community love and commitment to the Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady was the most attractive. The Eucharist and the Blessed Mother are at the heart of everything the community is and does. The strength of their community life and their joy in living their religious life was also incredibly attractive.

The contemplative spirituality, monastic spirituality, lectio divina, silence, liturgy of the hours (sung), prayer life

The Dominican Charism of preaching is lived out in my community in a way that is faithful to the Church and to the founding of the Order. This fidelity is manifest in the life centered on and flowing from the Eucharist and the particular Eucharist and Marian character of this Community is what most attracted me to the institute. I loved the Dominican commitment to the truth and when I experienced how that commitment was lived out by the community through their schedule of prayer, study, and work and through the personal witness of the Sisters. I knew that this community was home.

The emphasis on embracing the richness and beauty of the Catholic Church and the love they have for beautiful liturgy.

The example of Saint Francis

The example of the members whom I worked with prior to entering; the mission and various ministries of the institute

The feeling of "home" when I was on their campus.

The flexibility of their life and their encouragement for us to draw on our natural talents

The Holy Spirit.

The joy and enthusiasm of the Sisters The beautiful prayer life I felt at home with them. The fact that we are an active community, so I can be more of a witness to people.

The joy and goodness of the men in the Order.

The joy I saw that the sisters possessed. It seemed to me that they were the happiest people I ever met and I felt that I would not even be that joyful unless I followed their example and joined the community.

The joy of its members. The joy that flowed from the work and lives that they led. That, the international nature of the order, and the academic focus all attracted me to the institute.

The joy of the sisters

The joy of the Sisters and their fidelity to their calling to be a bride of Christ. The Sisters really know Jesus and that he loved them. This comes from the regular prayer life and daily encounter with Christ in the Eucharist. This enables the Sisters to pour forth Jesus to the students they serve in the Apostolate. Also, the balanced way of life in the Dominican charism drew me.

The joy that emanated from St. Francis' love for God.

The joyful witness of the Sisters-their commitment to their mission (education) within the charism of their tradition (Dominican). Their radical witness (especially wearing their habit) while being, kind, and open.

The Lasallian Charism of Education in the service of children, especially the poor

The Latin Mass and Eucharistic Adoration.

The life of prayer

The lives of those in formation, with whom I studied, and their commitment to their religious vows combined with their joy, intelligence, and enthusiasm for the lives they'd chosen.

The love for the poor.

The main ministry (teaching), along with the community lifestyle

The Mercy Charism as lived through the vision of religious life that our foundress initially instituted, which includes the prayer life, common life, apostolates, and essential elements of religious life as promoted by the CMSWR.

The Message of La Salette

The mission of reaching to the margins and falling away Catholics

The mission, the opportunities, and the life of our founder attracted me most to my religious institute.

The mission.

The most influential component to my discernment of this specific institute was the fact that they pray for 2 holy hours a day as a more active community. I also really appreciate the other opportunities for individual private prayer that my religious institute allows for. Lastly, I was really attracted to the charism and its relevance in the Church today.

The normalcy of the Sisters and their apparent deep love for the Lord.

The openness and the camaraderie of the communities and the emphasis on growing closer to God in and through community and the varied ministries in religious life

The personalities of the priests I met and the joy they carried with them.

the prayer life, and the mission to preach and educate the youth

The prayer, community life and humility

The prospect of entering the same religious order as the Saints of the past that were part of the order.

The pure joy of the Sisters attracted me most to this institute. I was blessed to learn my community while studying and was always joyful the Sisters, even when circumstances were not ideal. It was clear this joy was a supernatural gift flowing from their liturgically centered life and Eucharist-centered hearts. The joy they have knowing their identity as religious, as spouses of Christ and watching it bears fruit is what attracted me most.

The religious I met and how they lived their life and the spirituality of the order.

The sense of community and shared mission among the sisters. There was a deep care for each other that stretched across states and a shared life and purpose at the service of the Church and the world.

The Sisters and their joy in being sisters.

The spirituality and quality of men that were part of the institute inspired me to consider this life. I felt like an authentic relationship with Jesus would be available with this spirituality.

The spirituality matched mine. I was drawn to the charism and devotions in it. The members were quite friendly.

The spirituality, an apostolate and habit all equally attracted me.

The tremendous sense of acceptance, the sense of belonging, structure and daily prayer throughout the day. The Abbot and superior are patient as are all the brethren. Overall, the monastery as a whole truly reflects the real true ways and personality of our Creator the triune God.

The vocation of living in community, serving the community and growing closer to Christ all in one lifestyle is what drew me into religious life.

The witness of a Dominican friar that I met while in college most attracted me to the Order. His life was a model of joy and holiness that inspired me to want to live the same way. Particularly, the way he elucidated the Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas and the way he demonstrated the beauty of a deep prayer life with God were inspirational to me.

The witness of the Sisters and the unique aspects to their prayer life attracted me. The immense joy that each Sister radiated really witnessed to me that God was present at the center of their lives. Also, the Marian consecration and daily Eucharist adoration attracted me. I knew God was calling me to a community that had adoration often and was very devoted to Mary.

Their charism - Commitment to the holiness of the members - Their joy! - Community life - Emphasis on a Eucharistic spirituality

Their charism of community and the founder of the Order.

their charism of living out their lives Joyfully in imitation of St. Francis of Assisi and the Blessed Mother!!! I was also really attracted to their simplicity, which allowed them to freely live out their vocations and identity as a daughter, bride, and spiritual mother.

Their charism to educate and evangelize to the youth in order to save souls and glorify God through a balanced lifestyle

Their charism.

Their community life and their ministry.

Their joy and eagerness to serve Jesus. They radiated a love only found in Jesus and I was very attracted to this. They were aiming to serve Him but seemed so normal while doing it. There was never a time during my first visit where I felt like an "outsider" I instantly felt at home and supported by everyone I met.

Their main ministry is a retreat center and spiritual direction, which I hope to be involved with, but I was drawn to the variety of ministries/occupations of the members.

Their openness to walk with others during their faith journey and their ability to apply the teachings of the church in a way that people can relate to.

Their sense of community and their dedication to live out the Gospel in service to the poor and most abandoned.

Their work at one particular ministry site.

There are many aspects which attracted me to this religious institute, the first being their devotion to the Eucharist and to Mary. Each day begins with a holy hour to center and ground each Sister properly for the day ahead. I also love how rooted in the Church's tradition they are: the habit is worn by all, there are many ancient monastic practices observed, etc. And finally, one more beautiful aspect that attracted me was the Community's focus on Heaven. Each member lives so joyfully in this world, yet so much of the focus is on the life of heaven, striving toward our true homeland daily and living as much as possible the life of heaven on earth.

This religious community works on my previous university's campus, and I did not know they existed until I enrolled. I admired their simplicity example and flexibility among us, college students. They also showed or deep-rooted reverence for the Eucharist

Type of Ministry

Up until this point, what attracts me to my religious institute is the self-offering to Christ through the three vows.

Wanting to serve the poor, love nature and others.

Wearing of the religious habit, faithfulness to the Catholic Church, Eucharistic reverence, charisma, and the example of the sisters I met and their joy.

What attracted me most to the Divine Word Missionaries was the missionary work that they did around the world while living and working in intercultural communities.

What most attracted me to my religious institute was their pure joy. Every Sister was extremely kind and in love with God. This struck me along with their habit, and their devotion to both the Eucharist and Mary. All of these aspects were very important to me and filled me with excitement when I thought about them. I do not think that any other community would be able to fill me so much as ours does. God knew exactly where he wanted me.

What most attracted me to the {Name of Religious Institute) was the charism-Proclaiming the Gospel with the most modern means of communication. I struggled during discernment within the desire to serve the physical poverty of our world, but then Jesus opened my eyes to see that there is a spiritual poverty in our culture especially, that is much greater than physical poverty. I was drawn by this desire to feed all of the hungry and impoverished souls of our culture at large.

What most attracted me to the religious institute was the daily Eucharistic adoration and Marian devotion, specifically the dedication the institute has to the rosary and spreading the truth to the world as a teacher in their apostolate. The institute centers their daily lives on the liturgy and the Eucharist as well as personal and community prayer life. The beautiful sense of community the Sisters lived in also greatly attracted myself to the religious institute.

What most attracted me was the charism and very familial feel of the order. We connect a lot with families in the parish and in present in their lives in ways that create a beautiful parish family. We also connect with priests and get to know them. I also liked the importance of living liturgically both in prayer and practice. It helped me to see how Christ is supported to be the center of our whole life.

What most attracted me was the joy of the Sisters and the love and care they showed to the people they served.

What most attracted me was two things equally - a focus on Mary and the size of my institute. I could have joined any number of religious orders for women and Mary would have been in the name somewhere, but I liked the Marianists because they didn't focus in on any one aspect or version of Mary the way some other orders do. They are for Mary as a whole and all that she is in all her forms. Second, the Marianists have a big family because they have 3 main branches: brothers/priests, sisters, and laity. This large mix, both here in the U.S. and internationally, I realized, expanded my opportunities as a sister with the Marianists and that intrigued me.

What most attracted me what the charism and the way it was lived out in the members of the congregation. I loved the joy among the Sisters, and the ever-discerning heart for how God is calling their (now our) institute now. I also loved the different ethnicities and backgrounds of the Sisters. I especially loved my formator and that there were younger Sisters (who I could greatly relate to) in the congregation.

When I saw how happy I was living in a very active way (involved in several ministries and committed to daily mass and personal prayer time), and the way I interact with others, I realized that this way I was living looked a lot like the way sisters in this religious institute

live. They work hard and are busy serving the Lord, but with such cheerful friendliness and always keeping their commitment to prayer as a high priority.

Working with and caring for the Young and the Poor

working with the poor

Working with young people and having the opportunity to teach. I was a high school Theology teacher for two years (I'm 24 right now) and I absolutely loved it. Out of humility, God gave me the grace to do a good job. We prayed a decade of the rosary a day. I want to go back to that teaching/ministry, with young people because I was good at it, and this order gave me the opportunity to do so. This order is also close to home, as the motherhouse is only one and a half hours away. As a religious, I'm not as overworked as a diocesan priest and have good amounts of time for prayer. The community, despite it's faults, is priceless to me, because I'm not lonely and have people to lean on. Not having a smartphone for my first 1.5 years will be tough, but it will be so nice to detox.

Q. 144: What do you find most challenging about religious life?

The following is a presentation of the responses of new entrants on what they find challenging about religious life. Slight editing has been done. Their responses include:

Abandoning myself to His will when I want to be in control the most.

Adapting to religious/ community life, learning/keeping track with various responsibilities in community life

Adjusting from old ways, habits, and customs had in the lay life and learning to fully adopt and take on the new and more challenging ones of the community to be able to die to self and live a life fully devoted to God.

Adjusting to community life has been challenging because of the independence had before entering. Likewise, obedience in all things has also been an adjustment but one that comes with time.

Adjusting to living with others. I had lived on my own for some time before joining.

adjusting to new environments

Age of sisters which at times prevents a lack of connection

All the challenges I have had so far seem like "good" ones, like getting adjusted to living a very different way of life and the smaller daily trials of community living.

aloofness of community members at times

As a novice, much of our communication is restricted. It's been challenging not connecting with friends.

As Benedict says, monks don't even have free will over their own bodies. In the novitiate, I am discovering each day the sacrifices I need to make in order to become a member of this community which is a very challenging thing to do. It is realizing that my community members and I are not perfect. It is being open to admitting mistakes and learning from them. It is learning that there are times, as uncomfortable as it is, that I need to call other members back into community. Finally, I think that it is incredibly challenging (but worth the effort) to build relationships with people you did not necessarily choose to individually live with. While I chose the community as a whole, there are certainly members within the community whom I would not be friends with out in the "real world."

As in any vocation, it is difficult to see your own weaknesses. I am constantly learning new areas that my heart needs to be purified especially as I spend time in Eucharistic Adoration

a vocation is a school of love and I am learning true charity through loving God single-heartedly and loving my Sisters. Though challenging, there is no place I would rather be.

At first detaching from the world. Getting used to a stricter life style. Otherwise I'm sorry I really don't have anything challenging me right now. Plus, I think that I am already used to the lifestyle for the most part.

At this time distance from my family since I have a close family relationship.

Balancing my duties and homework since my time is not my own.

Being away from family and friends

Being away from family and friends and having such limited contact with them.

Being away from family and limited communication with them during formation.

Being away from my family back home and having to get used to new forms of communication with them instead of texting them often

Being cooped up in a house in a major city where it is hard to get outside, because I'm from the woods. Also, prayer is tough because I'm the only one here who kneels and meditates, especially during adoration. We watch too much Netflix here, which threw me for a loop, because there's not enough time to watch that much TV because our world needs prayer. Our daily holy hours are only 35 minutes. We fast on Wednesdays, but that includes two small meals, a normal meal, and usually a beer at night. That's not fasting in my book... when my family fasts we might cave in around dinnertime and have a peanut butter sandwich. Living with the guys is tough because a lot of them chew with their mouths open. I know that I need to grow in humility more than they need to correct themselves, but I just want something a little more hardcore. And maybe a bit more normal. But then again, I'm only two months in, and I am poorly formed in my own ways. In addition, I am a miserable sinner, so in writing this, I need all of the prayers I can get.

Being fairly introverted, I have found that wearing the habit in public can be challenging as it draws a lot of attention. St. Dominic sent his young novices out into ministry right away, which - as formative as it is - can be rather nerve racking.

Being open to serve others and not oneself.

Brothers and fraternity is not easy.

Celibacy

Celibacy and Money

Chastity

Chastity and community life (though I love it, it can be really tough).

Chastity.

Coming from working for the last six years, it seems that the Church and especially academia are very stagnant. I am also really working on how to express and receive intimacy outside the context of a girlfriend.

COMMUNITY

community life

community life

community life

community life and moving from different locations frequently.

Community life and separation from home.

Community life is the most beautiful and challenging for me.

Community life is the most challenging aspect but also the most rewarding.

Community life, and also overly lax liturgy.

community life, gross

Community life, while highly enriching, poses daily challenges.

Community life; particularly a great divide between political beliefs (national, local, and Church) between the young generation and the elderly of the Order.

Community life! I think I have never been more self-conscious before in my life. But that is because of I see of my weaknesses in community life that I did out in the world. That being said, it is a blessing because it is really purifying me and teaching me greater ways to love.

Community Life.

Community members who are not faithful to the Church and her teachings, as well as some loneliness and a desire to live with people who are a little more like-minded with me

Confidence in myself

Constantly adjusting to new communities as people exit the congregation

cultivating a disposition of interior silence through practice of exterior silence

Detachment from the world, length of formation, manual labor, fasting and avoiding gluttony.

Disagreements about the faith and theology and prayer

Discerning whether my vocation is with religious life or whether God is calling me to take care of my family.

Distance and separation from family; the counter-culture nature of religious life

Doing things, the way the community does them and not the way I want to do them, practicing charity with my sisters when I would do something differently/react differently.

Doubt as to whether I'm where God wants me to be and whether I am capable of meeting the expectations of religious professed and the comparisons to others that arise from that doubt

Dryness in prayer, and that it is a constant battle against ourselves. Everything involved in religious life is a blessing, but sometimes it is hard to realize this and have the proper attitude of openness and gratitude.

Embracing life as it being where God wants me right now instead of constantly asking myself and God if this is where I am truly called to. Also, being away from family is a challenge that I am continuing to grow in.

Ensuring that I integrate these most important parts of who I am with the life I am living, while also accepting the desires and guidance of my superiors. When those two aren't perfectly aligned (e.g. varying definitions of religious poverty), there can be some tension within myself that makes it difficult to know if I am following God's will the best I can, if this is the right place for me, if I need to speak out and try to bring change to the broader institution, etc.

Every day I become more aware of my poverty, weakness, and need for God's love and mercy. In these first 2 months, the most challenging part of religious life has been letting myself be poor, weak, broken, and needing and not relying on my own strength (self-reliance) but allowing the Gospel to be sung through the witness of my life through a converting life of letting myself be loved and forgiven. There is no hiding.

Extremely small home school classes.

Finding out about yourself, God's will, and accepting it with humility and gratitude

Finding the supernatural sense in the most ordinary days of our lives.

First, missing my family has been an extreme cross to bear, as I was very close to them, and this is my first time away, plus communication is limited now. Second, the adjustment to a

life of sacrifice and renunciation of the world. I think for young women coming from our modern world today, including me, it is hard to readjust and adapt to a life of poverty, and obedience as well, with fewer comforts, convenience, and such. Sometimes, it's also the little things, like struggles in prayer, community life on a particular day, not feeling well, and so on. Also, there is a lot to learn at first it can be overwhelming. Yet, it is such a beautiful gift and joy every day despite the challenges.

Getting accustomed to a new environment, changing certain habits of doing things, the process of growing with talking with other postulants and sisters. how it can be tiring, especially at first, since I am not used to 5:00 am rises.

Having to stop and ask for permission instead of seeing something needs to be done and doing it right away.

I can't have my dog with me and at times I'm not successful in considering my Sisters when I make a decision.

I definitely miss my family, but I also really miss having stimulating intellectual conversations about literature, history, culture, current events, etc. As a teacher, and in general as a Catholic adult, I experienced a lot of helpful conversations and (generally friendly) debates that helped shape my thinking while giving me insights about the people I lived and worked with. In the convent, I sometimes feel that I live in a bit of an echo chamber: there are some very inspiring conversations, but there are also many times that, in an effort to keep the conversation edifying, everyone says the same thing, rehashes the same topics, and avoids any real discussion. There are also times when, if a new perspective is introduced, the response is to immediately steer the conversation in a different direction, to say something politely repressive, or else to allow a mildly awkward silence until the sister attempting to suggest a different perspective has given up talking. We talk much more than I expected to about saints, and less than I would have hoped about the world we live in. I love saints, and I do appreciate the need to distance ourselves from some aspects of secular society (especially during initial formation), but it would be nice to have discussions of the aspects of the broader society that are true, beautiful, inspiring, or at least thought-provoking (without having to get nervous or defensive when those aspects challenge the way that members of our community think about things).

I find community life and the diversity of opinions to be most difficult.

I find it challenging to leave behind family and friends.

I find it challenging to rely so much on others in the community and on God. I was very much in control of the world. I have had to learn to let things go and do not know everything all at once. In essence, my perfectionism must be broken down and this is what I struggle against the most. I am constantly reminded that I am finite.

I find it deeply painful to be affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church and its oppressive teachings.

I find it most challenging to be faithful and recollectedness in living the vows every moment throughout the day.

I find it most challenging to not compare myself to other members in the institute. This comparing keeps me from seeing what God wants me to see in myself, others, and His will for my daily life.

I find that it's not easy living with others that have different opinions than your own. But we all share our faith together and that makes us great brothers together.

I find the lack of flexibility in the daily schedule to be most challenging.

I find the most challenging thing is having the courage to let my formator and the other Sisters know things that I don't know (that I feel I am expected to know). Coming directly from college, some normal "adult" things I am still learning.

I have found in religious life that you have many opportunities to practice self-denial in different ways and that can be challenging at times, but ultimately it is very beautiful to be able to practice self-denial. Adjusting to or really entering into community life can be challenging at times, but as I have grown to know my Sisters better, it has become easier to form deeper relationships with each one of them.

I miss not being physically with my family everyday but I know that this sacrifice bears much fruit! In doing God's will it is best for me and what is ultimately best for them too.

I tend to miss family and get homesick. This is what makes me want to leave. I think God is still calling me here to live and learn, so I will do my best to accept my state in life and rest in God.

I think being away from my family.

I think it is challenging to live a life separate from what most experience in the world when it comes to starting a family and excelling in a career. However, I think my attitude toward needing to conform to the world will eventually change over the formation process.

I think learning how live well in community is really hard. It's not just about doing okay, it's about becoming a positive presence in the community that lifts up others. All the while, though, one is 100% human and is as just as weak and sensitive as anyone. It's easy to react in the moment without taking the time to choose how to respond

I'm not sure about MOST challenging, but here are some things that have been on my mind lately. This year, having to move far away from friends and family was a real difficulty. One more general tension also is: trying to understand what it means (on a practical and a

spiritual level) to be a vowed religious in our present day and age, when religious life tends to look so different from the stereotypical or historical images of it. (Relatedly, it's also difficult to communicate my experiences to others back home, since they have even less understanding about religious life than I do.) I also worry that I will fail to grow as I should even with so many wonderful supports in place, and then I'll have no one to blame but myself. And the fact that many members of my institute seem (to me) to disregard Church teaching on certain topics is a struggle for me; but I love them, and I do feel called here.

If this is my true calling from God. Fitting in time for personal prayer.

In the four months I have been adjusting to community life is the biggest challenge.

In the time of Covid-19, the most challenging aspect of religious life has been the limitations we face as a community. Because we are an apostolic body, we serve in the community several times a week. This means that we have to observe safety protocols in the house together, including sitting and eating 6-feet apart, not singing during Mass, and limiting the time we spend in large group settings. This has been a challenge for all members of our community.

Initial living with new members of the community

Integration

Interpersonal dynamics though not confined to religious life.

Isolation from normal social activities.

It has been challenging to re-orient myself away from worldly ends and towards the elevated ends of the call I have received. It is a difficult, but enriching, experience to confront some of the world-views which I had ascribed to while in the world, to see them in their true light, and to take the truth from them while getting rid of the falsity. My thinking caused me to form perpetually habits in my behavior. It is a challenge to sort the true from the false with patience.

It is hard being patient with myself (and other sisters) when learning all the little tasks that go into convent life and community living. It is a challenge to remain patient and to be content as a postulant to grow and learn (not to do everything perfectly all at once!) It is also difficult to filtering out tendencies or habits and ways of thinking picked up from the world; difficult in that it is hard to remember to rid them of your person or let them be developed, transformed.

It was difficult for me to adapt to community life. I was used to being surrounded by extroverts in college; most of the men in formation are introverts, and I was uncomfortable with silence. Luckily, I adapted practical and personal conversation, as well as simple patience over time.

Lack of friendship and leisure time and activities with community members; not having someone else in formation to share and compare experiences with.

Learning how to adapt to different personality types.

Learning the way of life, customs of the community, and adjusting/ the transition to religious life from secular life.

Learning to be vulnerable and move past a rather difficult family life into the freedom of living in a community steeped in unconditional love.

Leaving away immediate family and friends and country. Accepting all the challenges of daily community life.

Letting go of ties within and opening up

Life in a monastery is much more rigorous than I was used to- less sleep, food and more physical labor, the life is not easy. Being away from family, friends, home and not leaving the enclosure, so can't go back for visits. You cannot do or go whatever/wherever you want, or buy whatever you want/need. Adjustment takes time and giving up marriage and family.

Limited contact with friends and family back home

Little challenge when I left my country

Living away from my family.

Living in a larger community and maintaining a diversity of relationships

Living in a situation where so little of the enormous potential of the life is realized. especially in regards to liturgy and common life.

Living in community, sacrifices and assimilating to the daily schedule.

Living in community. It's the one of the most beautiful parts of religious life, but also a very big area of growth for me. Especially as an introvert, balancing time with others and growing in friendships but also knowing what I need.

Living with "different" personalities. Sometimes certain individuals can be difficult.

Living with 70 other women, ranging in age from 27 to 103, with very different personalities and emotional competence levels is often a challenge! Also coming from another country (Australia) which is 10,000 miles away, has a different dialect and much warmer weather is also a challenge at times!

Living with members who confuse/have infused politics and religion together. Especially here in during this tumultuous political season.

Living with people from different backgrounds and personalities.

loneliness, missing home, feeling like I have to be "on"

Loss of freedoms I took for granted before like walking to the post office.

Making time for a vivid prayer life during formation and apostolic ministry, and responding to God's concrete calls in daily life--loving my community members, etc.

Managing my time, with so many things going on in the day, making sure I prioritize properly and do everything God wants me to do each day.

Missing family members

Moving away from family and friends. Leaving the good life, I had before entering and trusting in the Lord.

My self-will.

Navigating lots of different personalities/standards; balancing community life and study (time management) and finding time for personal prayer.

Navigating temptations from pornography to sloth to selfishness. Learning how to pray without thinking about "how I'm praying." There are certain people harder to love and accept than others, because of how they talk or look or come across. Sometimes I challenge my aversion toward these people, sometimes I don't. Breaking through these barriers is extra effort, but can be fruitful work. This can take the form of starting a conversation or providing direct assistance.

none

Not always finding the time for personal prayer

Not having a family/children.

Not pursuing a vocation to matrimony with the woman I love

Nothing would be challenging if I were virtuous! I have learned that entering a monastery doesn't magically make you a different person. I still have all the same sins and weaknesses.... only now that I know there's nowhere I can run to get away from them. I can't run anymore. I have to stand and fight.

Obedience

Obedience

Overcoming my own sinfulness.

Philosophy requirements.

radical living of the vows

Religious communities do not work together often enough and that leads to our detriment.

Renouncing independence and making independent decisions.

Right now, as a pre-novice, I find the balance of work/leisure/prayer a challenge. This is mostly due to the fact that there is a pandemic destroying the country, but I think even without that, I would be struggling as a young adult to find time for all the aspects of my life in a single day.

Sacrificing a lot to follow God. Having doubts if religious life is actually right for me. Being occasionally homesick and just worrying if my family will be okay without me.

Separation from family and friends

Separation from family and friends, as well as the common life and learning to deny self in order to love God and others more perfectly.

Service. it is difficult to give off yourself completely, whether in the apostolate or just in the community. It takes dying to self for the good of the other.

Silence/ recollection.

Slowing the pace of life has been challenging since we come from such a busy world. We shouldn't be rushing around all the time. Also, sometimes it is hard to follow the schedule when you would rather be doing something else of that moment.

So far, I have found adapting to the loving of joyous environment where you are valued for your being rather than doing most challenging. In the world you can get sucked into the culture of you re only loved I wanted so far as your able to things and are useful, but in religious life that mentality has to be gone because our primary job is contemplation and union with God which the secular world would not final to be "useful" though it's the highest calling one can have.

So far in my Postulant year, I have found the feeling of separation the most challenging: a sense of alienation from some friends especially who now view me very differently. It is also a struggle to reconcile some of my past friendships because I realize that the basis of these friendships is not as solid as I had thought. In summary, I think the entrance into religious life makes the divides that I feel between myself and others come out more harshly than before.

Something I have found to be the most challenging about religious life is the adaptation to the daily use of the English language. Initially, this was a challenge coming from an environment where a non-English language was commonly spoken in the home.

Starting as a newbie, figuring out everything from scratch.

staying in one place

Surrendering completely to committing to becoming a member of this religious institute. Interior battles to give all to God.

The academic part, I've never really liked institutionalized learning. I'm more of a solo learner who prefers learning by going on line and finding lessons and courses that I can take at my own pace or simply go to educational websites and going from there.

The age difference between myself and most of the members.

The amount of letter writing.

The balance between study and community time. Sometimes, we are so busy with study life that I kind of felt the lack of community bonding.

The commitment to obedience and following a collective formation program - not being able to choose what you do, when you do it and how you do it.

The communal life. Loving one's neighbor sounds easy, until you live and prayer with them 24/7 and always trying to be charitable, wishing them the best. It's a big growth in humility and love.

The decline in membership, and an insistence on including a prominent amount of "progressive thinking" instead of Catholic theology.

The declining numbers and thinking about the future.

The differences between friars of various generations can provide a lot of difficulty in entering deeply into fraternal relationships in community.

The different points of views people follow.

The fidelity to the charism of our order

The initial shock of change from the world, the limit contact with family, and it is hard to be vulnerable at times unthinkable formater and other co-sisters.

The lack of young membership and the declining numbers. Also the hesitation to allow younger members more leadership roles.

The Lifestyle

The missionary work: to do it well demands the whole self and a willingness to really lay down one's life.

The monotony of daily life.

The most challenging aspect of religious life for me has actually been dealing with my family's reaction to my entrance. I found the transition to be quite easy and smooth from living in the world to living in a religious institute. However, my family did not feel the same and let me know it. Since entering, I have received wonderful support and wise guidance from my superior on how to not diminish my joy in being a member of the Community while still acknowledging what my family is experiencing.

The most challenging aspects are separation from family, a sense of loss of independence, the call to obedience, the intense human formation, and the adjustment to inter-generational community.

The most challenging thing about religious life so far has been the continuous evaluations from fellow novices and superiors.

The most challenging thing for me is the adjustment of not being in as much contact with my friends and old community. This has gotten easier with time but remains a great sorrow in leaving everything behind to pursue the Lord with my entire heart.

The most challenging thing is being separated from my family and letting go of personal "freedom" (sleeping in, eating ice cream whenever I want, not needing permission, etc.)

The strenuous work and very limited personal time.

The tension of what our mission is in the 21st century (social justice or evangelization or both, etc)

The transition from being immersed in the world/culture of the world and going to live such a hidden life. But that exact thing invites trust in God and deep spiritual growth.

The uncertainty of the future, and what religious life will look like

The vow of obedience, restrictions on travel, and living in accordance with the community schedule

The vows, specifically the vow of chastity.

There's nothing quite like entering the convent during a world-wide pandemic! Its a year I will never forget, that for sure! For s short bit after Covid hit, I was wondering if I'd even be able to enter this year, especially since there are many elderly Sisters in my community

along with younger ones. I was the only one who entered this year, too, but any fears of feeling alone in that were quickly dispelled after I entered. My community was so welcoming and did everything they could to make me feel welcome and included, even though I had to quarantine for a bit after the entrance for the safety of my order Sisters. Because of Covid, we cannot leave much to help participate in ministry/ vocation events for young people in schools and communities. But we have slowly been finding safe ways to have smaller discernment retreats and vocation visits for young women discerning with our community. The hardest thing though was saying goodbye and having very limited contact with family and friends outside the convent other than a few letters and a short family visit. One of my parents also became very sick recently after entrance. But my sister has been a huge support through it all. And family is very important to our community.

Thus far, I find community living to be the most challenging. I am learning to be in a peer, sister relationship with women who are decades older than me. I am learning to communicate and share of myself in new ways. It is all good, but it is challenging.

Time management

Time management, too much to do throughout the day, with little time for personal prayer. The monastery is busier than I anticipated it to be.

to accept myself in my brokenness especially be patient with myself

To follow the vows.

To live an interior life where we have to practice the mortification of senses

Trying to cut back on particular routines and comforts that I know distract me from my spiritual life, both personally and with the community. Basically, "getting out of my old habits and into a new one."

trying to transform loneliness into solitude

Very little contact with my family and silence- quiet time with our Lord- to sit and think with Him.

Waking up at 5am every day. Having to be obedient to the schedule when sometimes I'd rather be doing something else.

What I find most challenging about religious life at the moment is the transition that takes place in relationship with family and friends. Those relationships are still there, but the form, length and frequency of communication is different. The transition is a sacrifice for both parties involved and it may take a few months or years until the new pattern of communication settle in.

What I find most challenging about religious life is learning how to love myself and know my identity as a daughter of God. This is something that was difficult for me before entering, but now have entered, it is a beautiful door that is being opened to me. While, yes, it is challenging recognizing all my in ordered ways and thoughts, it is beautiful and freeing being able to grow here, allowing me to grow in closer union with God.

What's been most difficult for me is that my time is not my own. I have quite a few responsibilities and people that I am responsible for. I'm not the one making my own schedule and deciding what I do when. Someone else is doing that for me.