

**Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.**



**Women Religious Institutes: Online Presence Survey (*Phase I*)
A Report for A Nun's Life Ministry
December 2016**

Executive Summary

This report is based on a survey administered between January 26, 2016, and June 1, 2016. It includes Catholic religious congregations, provinces, regions, delegations, monasteries, and other entities (jointly referred to as “units” in this report) present in the United States. The focus of the report is on the online activity in general and on the online vocation ministry in particular.

The survey sample was provided to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) by A Nun's Life Ministry. The survey sample includes 561 units. Out of this number, CARA received 257 valid responses resulting in a response rate of 46 percent.¹

Overall, 42 percent of responding units are congregations, 27 percent are provinces, 19 percent are monasteries, 7 percent are regions, 2 percent are delegations, and 4 percent have some other status.

Major Findings

Background Characteristics

- In terms of canonical status, 71 percent of all responding units are institutes of pontifical right, 13 percent are monasteries, and 11 percent are religious institutes of diocesan right. The remaining 5 percent have other canonical status.

¹ It is not possible to precisely estimate how many potential respondents may not have received the invitation by mail or email due to an invalid address. An additional 27 respondents logged into the survey online but did not complete the questionnaire. Previous CARA surveys of institutes have had response rates closer to 60 percent. However, in this case, the content of the study may not apply to many smaller units/institutes, those no longer actively seeking vocations, and some cloistered communities. Some of these potential respondents contacted CARA and indicated they did not or could not respond because they did not feel the survey applied to them.

- The number of sisters varies from 1 to 764 in a unit. On average, there is 1 postulant/candidate per unit, 1 novice per unit, 2 sisters who professed temporary vows per unit, and 107 sisters who professed perpetual/solemn vows per unit.
- On average, there are 4 African, African American, or non-Hispanic black sisters per unit, 100 Anglo, Caucasian, or non-Hispanic white sisters per unit, 9 Asian or Pacific Islander sisters per unit, 7 Hispanic/Latina sisters per unit, 5 Native American/American Indian sisters per unit, and 4 sisters of other races/ethnicities per unit.
- The most populous age groups consist of sisters who are 70 to 89 years old. On average, there are 40 sisters ages 70 to 79 per unit and 38 sisters ages 80 to 89 per unit.
- On average, there are 13 religious houses per unit.

Unit's Online Presence

- The most common form of a unit's online presence is on websites (92 percent of all responding units) followed by Facebook (70 percent), YouTube (48 percent), e-newsletters (47 percent), blogs (35 percent), and Twitter (33 percent) among others.
- Out of all responding units, 43 percent reported that the unit's online presence is closely connected with that of the institute and 19 percent reported that the unit's online presence is totally separate from the institute's online presence.
- Almost a quarter of the units (23 percent) have a written policy for use of social media by staff/employees of the unit and 40 percent have a written policy for use of social media by sisters (who are not staff/employees) who have personal social media accounts.
- When asked how many sisters in the unit regularly post or comment in the unit's social networks the most frequent response is only a few (41 percent of the units responding), followed by several sister (28 percent), no sisters (11 percent), and a lot of sisters (9 percent).
- Almost half of the units (49 percent) indicated that they use web analytics.
- Online presence of the unit is on average devoted between "quite a bit" and "very much" to describing the ministry, prayer, and community life of the unit.

Online Vocation Ministry

- On average, websites and Facebook are used "quite a bit" to promote vocations. On average, responding units used the following "a little" to promote vocations: Instagram, blogs, Twitter, YouTube, and e-newsletters. On average, responding units do "not use at all" any of the following to promote vocations: Snapchat, podcasts, Tumblr, chat rooms,

other social media, forums or discussion boards, live streaming events, LinkedIn, and Pinterest.

- The majority of survey participants (75 percent of all respondents) indicated that sisters in the unit provide the vocation content for online use.
- In one third of the units (34 percent of the units that reported on the issue), the vocation content is updated online less than once a month, in 20 percent the vocation content is updated online at least once a month, and in 15 percent the vocation content is updated online at least once a week.
- The vast majority (76 percent) of units that responded do not have a written plan that identifies the desired outcomes and strategies for vocation promotion on the internet.
- Out of all respondents, 41 percent reported that vocation promoters in their unit seek training in using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc.
- On average, respondents agreed “very much” that being involved in social media is a way to understand young people today.
- The respondents would like to see improvements in the following areas of their online vocation outreach: having more skills and time to establish and maintain online presence, being more present online, using specific vehicles of online presence (such as videos and blogs), and being more focused and deliberate.
- The responding units identified a number of challenges in regard to online vocation ministry including: being appealing and/or effective in reaching out to the target audience, keeping the unit’s online content current, continuously adapting to changes, etc.
- The responding units identified a number of benefits to online vocation ministry including the observations that the online environment provides a good way for the discerners to learn about a religious community without committing to the process, that online presence helps bring discerners (and in some cases more vocations to the unit), that online presence facilitates developing relationships with discerners, that vocation ministry online is relatively quick and efficient, etc.

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**Women Religious: Social Media Use Survey (*Phase II*)
A Report for A Nun's Life Ministry
December 2016**

Executive Summary

This report is based on a survey administered between January 26, 2016, and June 1, 2016. It includes Catholic sisters and nuns in Catholic religious congregations, provinces, regions, delegations, monasteries, and other entities present in the United States. The focus of the report is on the internet use in general, on various specific forms of online activity, and on the role of internet in the process of discerning religious life.

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) sent the survey to leaders in 561 units of religious institutes. The leader was asked to distribute copies of the survey to all sisters in their unit. CARA received 6,833 valid responses.

Overall, the sample includes sisters and nuns of all ages, levels of education, residing in each of the 48 contiguous states as well as in the District of Columbia, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico. The sample also includes women religious currently residing abroad (assuming that they belong to the units present in the United States).

Major Findings

Demographics and Background

- The vast majority of women religious were born in the US and its territories (93 percent). Almost all women religious (97.5 percent) were born in 6 countries (US, Ireland, Mexico, Vietnam, Canada, and Philippines). The remaining 2.5 percent were born in 51 other countries.

- On average, sisters and nuns are 71 years old (a median of 74 years old). A quarter of these women religious is 67 years old or younger. Only 4 percent of all respondents belong to the Millennial Generation (i.e., born after 1981).
- The vast majority of sisters and nuns (89 percent) considered religious life for the first time before they turned 21 years old.
- One in two sisters and nuns (51 percent) professed (or expect to profess) final vows (i.e., perpetual commitment) when they were (or will be) up to 25 years old.
- Almost half of the sisters and nuns who live in the United States reside in the Midwest (46 percent).

General Internet Use

- Only 6 percent of sisters and nuns do not use the internet. Over a half (52 percent) of sisters and nuns buy or sell items on the internet and the vast majority (91 percent) sends and receives email.
- Almost all sisters and nuns (98 percent) have regular access to a computer or laptop.
- The vast majority of sisters and nuns (84 percent) who use the internet, do so at least once a day.
- A subgroup of sisters and nuns born after 1995 (n=56) feels “a little” that social media was very helpful when they were discerning a call to religious life (an average of 2.4 on a four-point scale ranging from 1=“not at all” to 4=“very much”).
- Almost half (45 percent) of sisters and nuns say they need more training or instruction with computer. On average, younger sisters and nuns (women religious-Millennials born after 1981) are less likely to feel in need of training than other sisters and nuns (women religious born in 1981 or earlier) by 8 percentage points.

Specific Kinds of Activities on the Internet

- The vast majority (85 percent) of sisters and nuns reads news articles and feature stories online. Almost a third (32 percent) read or follow blogs. One in ten (11 percent) have their own blog or are part of a group that blogs. Among those who blog, the majority (52 percent) posts to this blog less than once a month.
- Almost a third (32 percent) of all sisters and nuns have participated in a chat, facilitated a chatroom, or moderated a chatroom. Among those who chat, three quarters (75 percent) use chat less than once a month.

- Less than a quarter (22 percent) of sisters and nuns visit a forum or discussion board on their Institute’s website or elsewhere on the internet. Over a half (68 percent) of those who visit a forum or discussion board, do it less than once a week.
- A majority of sisters and nuns (56 percent) watch or listen to events that are livestreamed over the internet. A half (50 percent) of those who visit forums and discussion boards, do so less than once a month. One third (32 percent) of all sisters and nuns watch or listen to livestreamed events focusing on general information or providing entertainment. One in 25 sisters and nuns (4 percent) have organized or produced a livestreaming event.
- Over a quarter of sisters and nuns (26 percent) listen to podcasts. Among those who listen to podcasts, over a half (54 percent) do so less than once a month. Out of all responding sisters and nuns, 14 percent listen to podcasts focusing on general information and/or providing entertainment. One in 20 sisters and nuns (5 percent) stated that they have created a podcast.
- The sisters and nuns who use social media in general at least once a day constitute almost a half of the respondents (45 percent). Out of all responding sisters and nuns, 52 percent use YouTube and 44 percent use Facebook. Facebook is among the social media sites used the most.
- On average, responding sisters and nuns reported that meeting people who may be interested in a vocation to religious life is “a little” important reason for them to use social media (an average of 1.8 on a four-point scale ranging from 1=“not at all” to 4=“very much”). It ranked last behind connecting with family and friends, being informed, inspired or entertained, connecting with others in the Institute, connecting with people related to their ministry, and publishing their own content or messages.
- The majority of sisters and nuns (67 percent) use video sites such as YouTube or Vimeo. Over one third (35 percent) who use these sites do so at least once a week. The most frequently selected reason for using these sites is for general information and/or entertainment (45 percent of all sisters and nuns).
- Relative to all responding sisters and nuns, the younger sisters and nuns (women religious-Millennials born after 1981) are 5 percentage points less likely to visit a forum or discussion board, 3 percentage points less likely to read or follow blogs, 2 percentage points less likely to use podcasts, almost equally likely to watch or listen to events that are livestreamed over the internet, and 8 percentage points more likely to use video sites such as YouTube or Vimeo.

Internet Use and Religious Discernment

- Among the survey participants who considered religious life for the first time after 1980 the following was used during religious discernment: websites of religious Institutes (45 percent), videos (27 percent), vocation- or discernment-oriented websites (27 percent), diocesan websites (18 percent), newspaper or magazine websites (16 percent), social media (16 percent), blogs (12 percent), forums or discussion boards (7 percent), podcasts (5 percent), livestreaming events (3 percent), and chat rooms (2 percent).¹
- Among the survey participants who considered religious life for the first time after 1980 the following internet activities were reported: read or listened to information about a specific Institute (44 percent), read or listened to information about religious life in general (38 percent), interacted with Catholic sisters and nuns (26 percent), and connected with others who were discerning a call to religious life (20 percent).

¹ Websites came into existence over 25 years ago. Social media platforms were introduced much later, e.g., MySpace 2002, Facebook 2004, YouTube in 2005, followed by many more.