

CARA Study Finds Abundance of Potential Priests and Sisters (8232)

Released today, the study's statistics show that 600,000 never-married Catholics are serious about religious vocations.

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by TIM DRAKE 10/09/2012 Comments [\(14\)](#)



WASHINGTON — A new study disputes the common myth concerning a vocations crisis. The study has found that there are an abundance of potential priests, deacons, religious sisters and brothers — 600,000, in fact.

The study, “[Consideration of Priesthood and Religious Life Among Never-Married U.S. Catholics](#),” conducted by the Georgetown University-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate ([CARA](#)), and commissioned by the U.S. bishops’ Secretariat for Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, was released today. It found that, among never-married Catholics, 3% of men and 2% of women have seriously considered a religious vocation.

“The good news is that more than 500,000 never-married men and women have seriously considered a vocation to priesthood or the religious life,” said Archbishop Robert Carlson of St. Louis, chairman of the bishops’ Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. “The challenge is to pastor and guide these individuals more effectively. This will require greater and more consistent encouragement from others, particularly within the family, and a more urgent focus on access to Catholic education for our young people.”

The findings echo what many vocations directors and observers have frequently stated.

“There is no vocation shortage.” So states Father Daniel Mahan, a priest of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, in his book *More Than Silver or Gold: Homilies of a Stewardship Priest*. “There is a shortage in those who respond to God’s call.”

That 2%-3% figure in the CARA study translates to large numbers.

“This is equivalent to 350,000 never-married men and 250,500 never married women,” said the survey. “Shepherding more of these individuals on the path to seeking a vocation would likely require a combination of greater outreach from the Church, encouragement from others, assistance in obtaining education prerequisites and dealing with other issues such as student loan debt.”

Corey Huber, president of the [Mater Ecclesiae Fund for Vocations](#), a charitable organization devoted to helping religious-vocation-minded individuals meet education debt, especially agrees with the last point. According to Huber, his nonprofit receives applications from 40-50 individuals annually who are prevented from pursuing a religious vocation because of higher-education debt. The average amount of indebtedness is \$35,000.

“Between 25% and 50% of those interested in a religious vocation have enough debt to prevent them from joining,” said Huber. “We’re only able to provide assistance to about 50% of applicants.”

In total, the organization has awarded 128 grants — totaling a commitment of \$1.3 million — to men and women with vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Of those, 77 are still in formation.

Survey Results

Among the survey’s additional findings:

- The survey found a generational difference between post-Vatican II Catholics, born 1961-1981, and the millennial generation, born after 1981. Post-Vatican II Catholics showed the least interest in vocations, whereas the survey found an increase in numbers among the millennial generation, in particular among men.
- Both men and women were nearly twice as likely to consider a vocation when encouraged by another person to do so.
- Women who participated in a parish youth group during their high-school years were more than nine times as likely to consider becoming a religious sister, whereas male respondents who participated in a parish youth group during their primary-school years were five times as likely to consider a religious vocation than those who did not.

- The study also showed a correlation between various practices, such as weekly Mass attendance, participation in Bible study, retreats, prayer groups or Eucharistic adoration, those who pray the Rosary or whom have a devotion to Mary, those who participate in parish ministry and those who regularly read the Bible or pray with Scripture, with those who are especially likely to have considered a vocation.
- For male respondents, those who attended World Youth Day or a National Catholic Youth Conference were more than four times more likely than those who had not to consider becoming a priest or brother.

During the 2005 World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany, then-Milwaukee Archbishop Timothy Dolan stated that while he was rector of the North American College in Rome, upwards of 50% of men studying to be priests cited World Youth Day as pivotal in their discernment to pursue the priesthood.

Hispanic Gap

The study also listed several challenges in vocation work, particularly among Hispanics, a growing population of the Church in the United States. About 48% of all Catholics in the United States born after 1981 are Hispanic.

According to CARA, educational requirements for religious-formation programs, such as college experience and the skills to pursue advanced education, put Hispanics at a disadvantage.

“Hispanic respondents are the least likely to report attending college or obtaining a college degree,” the survey found. “Hispanic respondents are also the least likely to indicate enrollment in a Catholic school at any level of their education, and the results of the study suggest that this makes it less likely that they will consider a vocation.”

“The majority of Latino/Latinas in the United States have very low levels of formal educational attainment, a situation that puts them in positions of extreme disadvantage,” said Hosffman Ospino, assistant professor of Hispanic ministry and religious education at Boston College, as cited by the study. “The number of Latino/Latinas who can respond to the call to ministry within current ecclesial structures and actually succeed is very small.”

A CARA press release states that despite intensive efforts by many bishops and religious communities to recruit Hispanic candidates, the shortfall of Hispanic clergy and religious remains.

About 35% of all Catholics in the United States are Hispanic, yet only 15% of the 2012 ordination class and 9% of the 2011 religious-profession class were Hispanic.

“This is a gap that continues to need urgent attention,” said CARA.

Emphasis on Catholic Education

The study found that the impact of Catholic education on religious vocations is strong.

One surprise in the survey is that Catholic primary education seemed to be more influential for females, whereas Catholic secondary school appeared more influential for males, in terms of a religious vocation.

Controlling for all factors, the CARA study found that female respondents who attended a Catholic primary school were more than three times as likely than those who did not to consider becoming a religious sister.

By comparison, among males, those who attended a Catholic secondary school were six times as likely to have considered a religious vocation.

The importance of Catholic high school is certainly born out in the case of the [Diocese of Bismarck](#), N.D., a diocese that has consistently led the country with the most ordinands per capita. The diocese is preparing to ordain its largest class — tying the classes of 2000 and 1962 — with six men in June 2013. Of the 14 men now being ordained and those currently in seminary, eight are Catholic high-school graduates.

“There’s a twofold reason for that,” said Father Tom Richter, vocation director for the Diocese of Bismarck. “First, our Catholic high schools are imbuing a strong Catholic identity, and, second, each of our three high schools has the presence of effective priests who serve as chaplains and instructors in the religion department. Students get to spend time with them in the classroom and see the priesthood up close.”

According to Father Richter, once the diocese ordains the 2013 class, Bishop David Kagan plans to assign an additional priest to each of the diocese’s Catholic high schools.

One thing about religious vocations is for certain: The past decade has seen a resurgence of interest in religious life.

“Overall, there’s definitely been an increase in inquiries about religious life over the last eight years,” said Patrice Tuohy, executive editor of the [Vision](#) vocation guide, a publication of the National Religious Vocation Conference. “The Internet has helped to increase awareness and inquiries.”

Tuohy said that they receive an average of 250,000 unique visitors to their website annually. She estimated that 30,000 of those are seriously considering a religious vocation. And 6,000 annually fill out the website’s “Vocation Match” tool. The majority of those are under the age of 30.

“There are many who continue to be attracted to religious life,” said Tuohy. “There are three things we know, based on the 2009 CARA study on religious vocations, about those entering

religious life today: We know that they are very interested in communal living, prayer and Catholic identity.”

“God is not calling fewer men and women to priesthood and religious life today. The difficulty for many of them is *hearing* that call,” said Jerry Usher, founder of [Vocation Boom](#), a resource dedicated to supporting the priesthood. “Our experience is that many are indeed answering that call, as our seminaries are full to capacity. We must, however, continue to ask the Lord to inspire many more young men and women to give their lives in service to God’s people.”

[Tim Drake](#) is the Register’s senior writer.

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Comments

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Posted by Tomas on Tuesday, Oct 9, 2012 12:30 PM (EST):

This is indeed good news but a little bit of counting your chickens before they’ve hatched. 600,000 men and women have seriously *considered* religious life. “Seriously” is an unquantifiable, subjective term. How many are being effectively shepherded through the process?

As of 2011 there were only 3600 seminarians in the US, and increase of about 125 over 2010. So out of these hundreds of thousands seriously considering only a fraction actually entered seminaries.

I’m happy to have any increase in priestly vocations to offset the catastrophic decline in second half of the 20th century (45,000 seminarians in 1965 vs 3600 today). But its hardly time to declare the vocations crisis over.

Posted by Carl on Tuesday, Oct 9, 2012 12:39 PM (EST):

Why the concentration on just “never married” men and women? There are quite likely as many or more previously married single men and women who would be excellent candidates. Our pastor, who is doing a wonderful and heroic job is just such a person.

Posted by Colleen on Tuesday, Oct 9, 2012 3:06 PM (EST):

Helping organizations like Mater Ecclesiae Fund for Vocations may be the absolute best thing we can do to encourage the religious life - student loan debt is a huge barrier to joining a religious community as a young adult. Removing or reducing the need to clear that debt will free a lot of people to answer their callings.

Posted by Jason on Tuesday, Oct 9, 2012 9:00 PM (EST):

There are tons of people out there considering a vocation. For many of us, however, there is no room at the inn.

I am a “late vocation.” I would have preferred a traditional order like the FSSP or the ICK but they don’t want late vocations. The only option for me was the diocesan Priesthood.

I had a sit down with the vocations director of my diocese and expressed truthfully my love of tradition and the Tridentine Mass.

They couldn’t wait to get me out of there and I never heard from them since. About a month after that I saw the vocations director at a pro life event. He definitely noticed me and remembered me but said not a word to me.

Posted by KJM on Tuesday, Oct 9, 2012 9:08 PM (EST):

Read more: <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/cara-study-finds-abundance-of-potential-priests-and-sisters/#ixzz28wl8khv5>