



Religious Life Today

A summary of a report from the National Religious Vocation Conference of the 2020 Study on Recent Vocations to Religious Life

by Catherine Bialkowski

Diversity is the hallmark of religious life today. Religious institutions in the United States vary in spirituality, charism, size, and mission. Between 2003 and 2018, over 3,500 women and men entered religious life: around 200 per year. The end of the twentieth century saw a decline in new members, but this decline is now leveling off.

The demographic of who is entering religious life today continues to change. The key characteristics of recent entrants, however, are young, culturally diverse, raised Catholic, and educated in Catholic schools. The average age of entrance is 28, and the majority of recent entrants have come from middle class families. For women, prayer and the way vows and the gospel are lived influenced their decision to enter; for men, concern about the future of the institute, its location, and its ministries.

Newer members tend to prefer living with members of different cultures, and are more racially diverse than professed members.

A quarter of newer members were born outside the United States. One of the most attractive parts of religious life to new members has been the aspect of community

life. They were drawn to praying together, celebrating holidays and feast days together, living with other members, and sharing meals. Around 13% of professed members are younger than 60, and most have at least a college degree. Most newer members also have a college degree, and also ministry and work experience.

Personal private prayer characterizes the spiritual life of members of religious institutions. Sisters, brothers, and priests have a desire to be Christ-centered; this unites them. Most say they were attracted to religious life because of the desire for a deeper relationship with God and for spiritual growth. The most common ways to meet members of a religious community are at the location the members serve, on websites (social media is used by 62% of religious institutes), through a friend or acquaintance, or through print materials.

The majority of recent entrants were invited by someone to consider religious life. Most entrants were employed before they entered religious life.

What unites new members to religious institutions is their abundant hope for the future, despite challenges and concerns that their communities face; but their journeys of falling in love with Jesus, the church, and the community are unique experiences.

A Shrine Reflection

by John DiMucci, Director of Sponsorship and Mission Services

It was over 16 years ago that I first visited the Seton Shrine and the place where Mother Seton and the first group of women vowed themselves as Sisters of Charity. During the recent pilgrimage and visit I was able to attend Mass and walk around the grounds. For me, there was something special about being in that particular space. Being inside the Stone House and seeing the close living conditions helped me understand that it was a real struggle and sacrifice for that early community. I really enjoyed the garden with the markers depicting the founding of the communities of Charity that trace their history and charism to that first group of heroic and faith filled women.

Humility ▪ Simplicity ▪ Charity



Paterson, New Jersey

Sister Dolores Lew, SC is a Physician Assistant at St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center emergency department, the second busiest E.R. in the entire country.

While walking around the Museum at Emmitsburg, we were very surprised and proud to see our very own Dolores Lew, SC gracing the wall for all to see.

The White House helped me reflect that the grace given to Mother Seton still lives on in women and men who embrace her love and care of the poor and the dispelling of ignorance especially through education. For those of us who continue the Mission of Charity I think of Mother Seton words, "Be attentive to the voice of grace." The trip to the Shrine helped me fine tune my ears to the voice of grace speaking today.



A Family affair at Emmitsburg; Sister Michele Lukenda, SC is joined by some family members in front of the Sister of Charity of Saint Elizabeth marker, which is in the garden. With her are her brother Lawrence, niece Kristina Junkroft, sister-in-law Karen Lukenda and sister Elaine Lukenda. The three women are also Seton Associates.