

For Release October 9, 2012

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

*Consideration of Priesthood and Religious Life
Among Never-Married U.S. Catholics*

In winter 2012, the Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University to conduct a national poll of never-married Catholics regarding their consideration of a vocation. CARA partnered with GfK Custom Research (formerly Knowledge Networks) to conduct the survey in May and June 2012. The survey was completed by 1,428 respondents, resulting in a margin of sampling error of ± 2.6 percentage points.

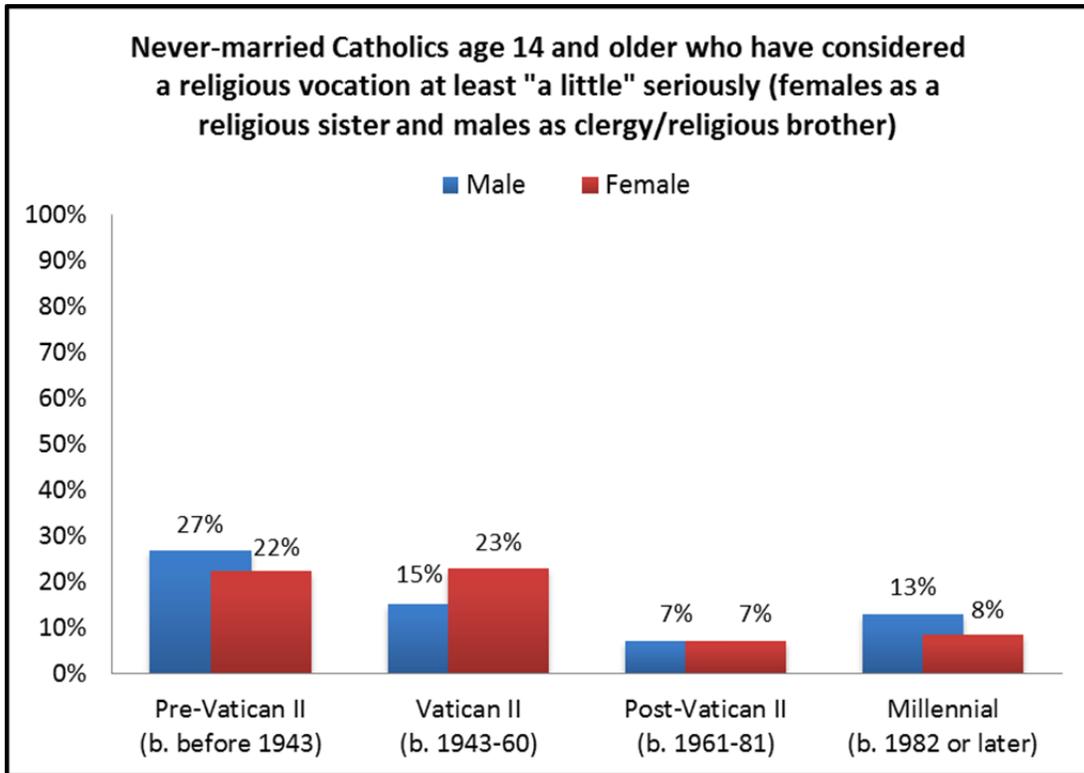
This study identifies subgroups in the never-married Catholic population—including teens and adults—and compares those who have considered a vocation at least “a little seriously” to those who say they have not considered this or who say they did so, but not seriously.

Overall, 12 percent of male respondents say they considered becoming a priest or brother at least a little seriously. Ten percent of female respondents say they considered becoming a religious sister at least a little seriously. The subgroups that are especially likely to have considered a vocation include:

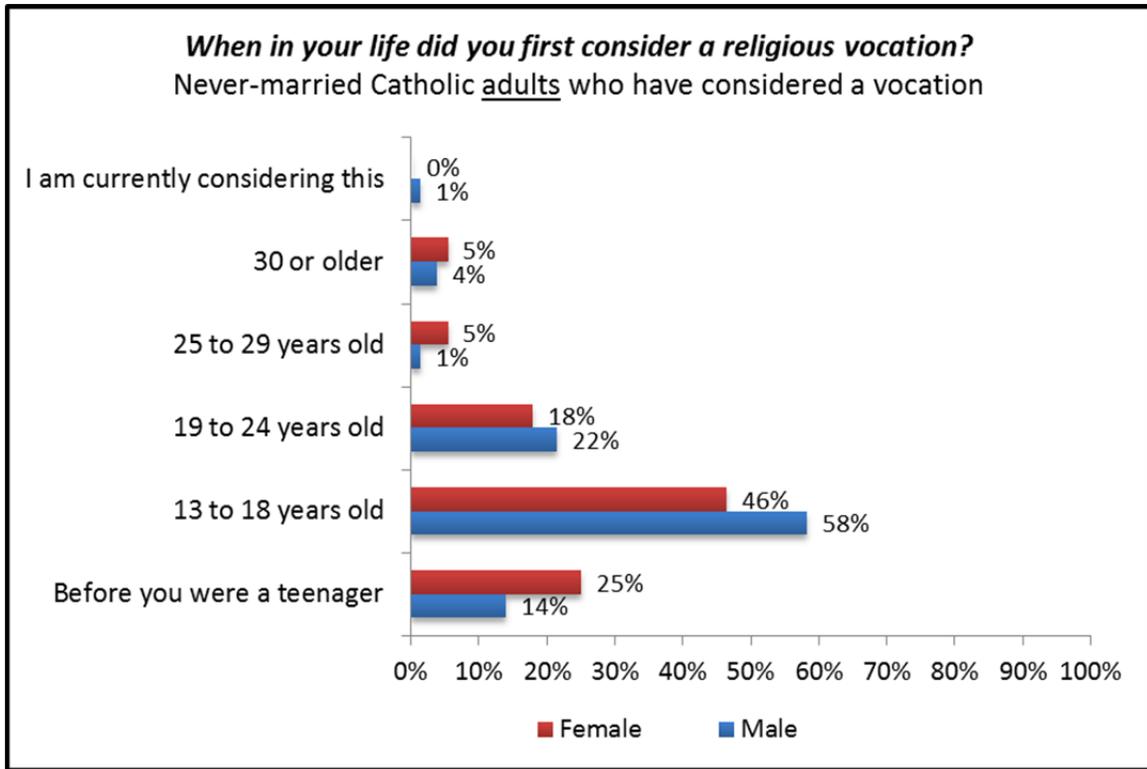
- Weekly Mass attenders (now and in high school)
- Those who attended Catholic educational institutions at *any* level (excluding parish-based religious education)
- Those who participated in Church-related groups, programs, or activities as a youth or young adult
- Those who lived in households where parents talked to them about religion at least once a week
- Those who say their faith is the most important part of their life (now and in high school)
- Those who participate in prayer and devotional activities, groups, or programs (e.g., Bible study, Eucharistic adoration, retreats, or prayer groups)
- Those who pray the rosary at least weekly (alone or in a group)
- Those belonging to a group that encourages devotion to Mary
- Those who were encouraged to consider a vocation by someone else (e.g., family, friends, clergy, religious)
- Those who regularly read the Bible or pray with Scripture
- Those who personally know priests and men and women religious (in their extended family or outside of it)
- Those who have participated in parish ministry (e.g., Lectors, Ministers of Holy Communion, Youth Ministers)
- Those who have participated in World Youth Day or a National Catholic Youth Conference

- Those who have recently accessed religious and spiritual content in traditional or new media

There are some generational differences in the consideration of vocations. A low point appears within the Post-Vatican II Generation (i.e., those born 1961 to 1981) with less than one in ten male and female respondents of this generation saying they have considered a vocation at least “a little” seriously. Vocational consideration appears to rebound slightly among the Millennial Generation (i.e., those born after 1981), particularly among men of this generation.



Among the *adults* surveyed (excluding those ages 14 to 17 in the sample) who say they have considered a vocation, most report that they did so between the ages of 13 and 24. Additionally, one in four Catholic females who have considered becoming a religious sister did so before they were a teenager.



Although most Catholics who are becoming priests, religious brothers, or religious sisters now are typically in their 30s or even older, it is likely that the roots of these vocations were established in their teen years or even earlier.

The survey reveals that there is no shortage of individuals who *seriously* consider these vocations among never-married Catholics in the United States. Three percent of men say they have “very seriously” considered becoming a priest or religious brother and 2 percent of women indicate they have “very seriously” considered becoming a religious sister. This is equivalent to 350,000 never-married men and more than 250,000 never-married women.



CARA is a national, non-profit, Georgetown University affiliated research center that conducts social scientific studies about the Catholic Church. Founded in 1964, CARA has three major dimensions to its mission: to increase the Church's self-understanding, to serve the applied research needs of Church decision-makers, to advance scholarly research on religion, particularly Catholicism. CARA's longstanding policy is to let research findings stand on their own and never take an advocacy position or go into areas outside its social science competence.

Contacts

Mark M. Gray, Ph.D., CARA Researcher: 202-687-0885 or mmg34@georgetown.edu
 Mary L. Gautier, Ph.D., CARA Researcher: 202-687-8086 or gautierm@georgetown.edu