

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

**Statistical Overview of  
Catholic Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation  
in the United States for 2022-2023**



**July 2023**

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CARA was founded by Catholic leaders in 1964 to put social science research tools at the service of the Catholic Church in the United States.

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## Introduction

In 1986, the USCCB Committee on the Laity completed the first nationwide study of formation programs designed to prepare lay Catholics for parish-level church ministry. CARA has been conducting studies of lay ministry formation programs nearly every year since 1994.

In 2005, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*. In that document, the bishops note that they have been using the terminology of *lay ecclesial minister* and *lay ecclesial ministry* since 1980 in *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity*.

In *Co-Workers*, the USCCB describes lay ecclesial ministry as characterized by:

- *Authorization* of the hierarchy to serve publicly in the local church.
- *Leadership* in a particular area of ministry.
- *Close mutual collaboration* with the pastoral ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons.
- *Preparation and formation* appropriate to the level of responsibilities assigned to them.

*Lay ecclesial minister* is intended to be a generic term, not a specific role description or title. *Co-Workers* states that the ministry is *lay* “because it is service done by lay persons [including vowed religious]. The Sacramental basis [for lay ecclesial ministry] is the Sacraments of Initiation, not the Sacrament of Ordination.” It is *ecclesial* “because it has a place within the community of the Church, whose communion and mission it serves, and because it is submitted to the discernment, authorization, and supervision of the hierarchy.” It is *ministry* “because it is a participation in the threefold ministry of Christ who is priest, prophet and king.”

The longest section of *Co-Workers* is on formation for lay ecclesial ministry. It begins by noting that the Church has always required proper preparation of those who exercise a ministry: it cites Canon 231, which states that “lay persons who devote themselves permanently or temporarily to some special service of the Church are obliged to acquire the appropriate formation which is required to fulfill their function properly.” The following pages describe the characteristics of such formation programs for lay persons in the United States.

# Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation Programs

## Number of Programs

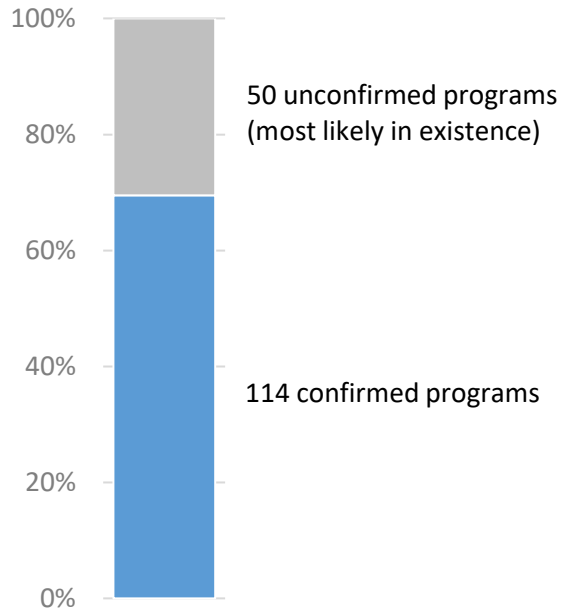
The role of the laity and their participation in the ministry of the Church has evolved considerably in the decades since the Second Vatican Council. At the same time, the number of formation programs to train lay people for professional church ministry has decreased. In 2022-2023, CARA identified a total of 164 confirmed and unconfirmed programs.

There were 114 confirmed programs, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 116 a year earlier). This includes 106 active and 8 dormant programs. The number of these programs averaged 231 and ranged between 114 and 331, since 1994-1995.

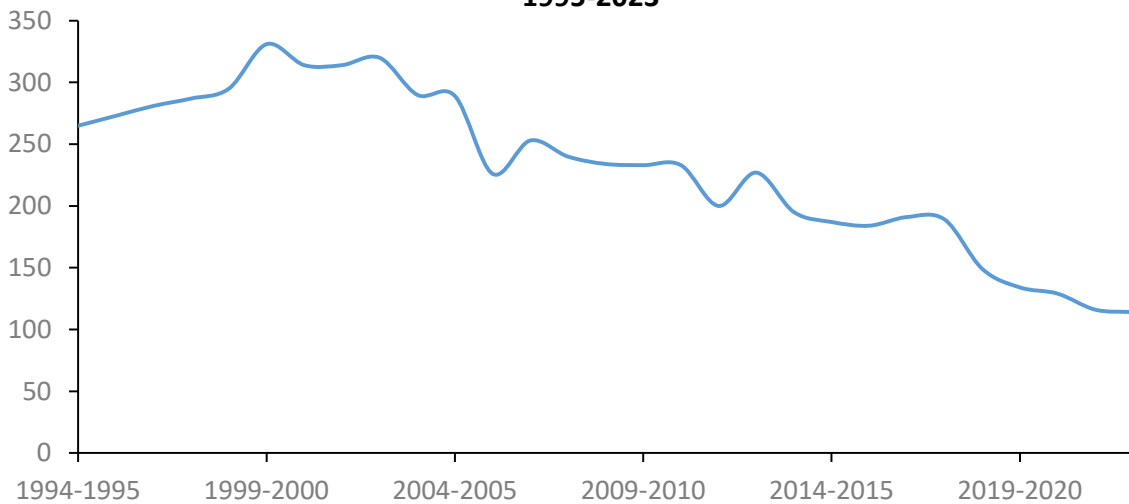
The confirmed and active programs were located in 36 states and 70 arch/dioceses, in the United States.

There were 50 unconfirmed programs (most likely in existence), in 2022-2023 (as compared to 52 a year earlier).

**Number of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation Programs, 2022-2023**



**Number of Confirmed Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation Programs, 1995-2023**



\* Data for 1995-1996 is interpolated.

## Certificate and Degree-Granting Programs

A number of different types of lay ecclesial ministry formation programs offer either a degree or a certificate in a ministry-related field. CARA asked program directors to classify their programs into one of four categories, according to the program’s relationship with a degree-granting institution.

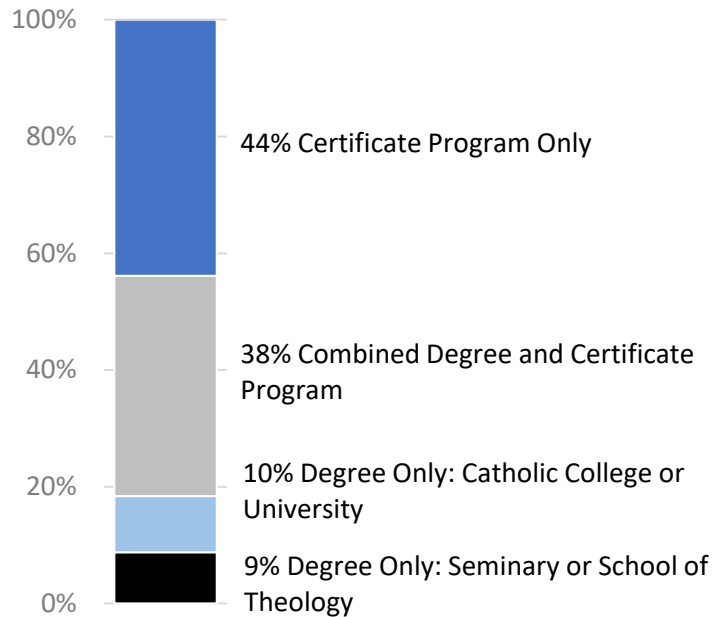
Two in five programs (44%) offered certificate but no degree, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 46% a year before). Since 2003-2004, the share of these programs averaged 48% and ranged between 41% and 52%.

One in three programs (38%) offered both degree and certificate, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 37% a year before). Since 2003-2004, the share of these programs averaged 39% and ranged between 35% and 43%.

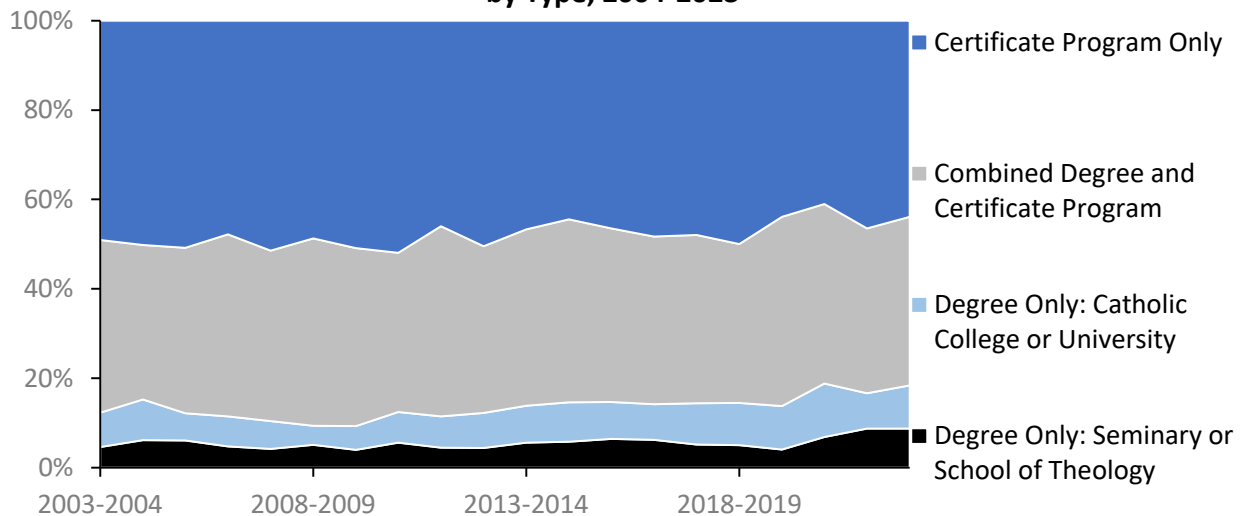
One in ten programs (10%) offered degree only and were affiliated with a catholic college or university, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 8% a year before). Since 2003-2004, the share of these programs averaged 8% and ranged between 4% and 12%. If the trend continues, the share of programs in this category is estimated to be 10% ±5%, in 2027-2028.

One in ten programs (9%) offered degree only and were affiliated with a seminary or school of theology, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 9% a year before). Since 2003-2004, the share of these programs averaged 6% and ranged between 4% and 9%. If the trend continues, the share of programs in this category is estimated to be 7% ±2%, in 2027-2028.

**Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Programs, by Type, 2022-2023**



**Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Programs, by Type, 2004-2023**

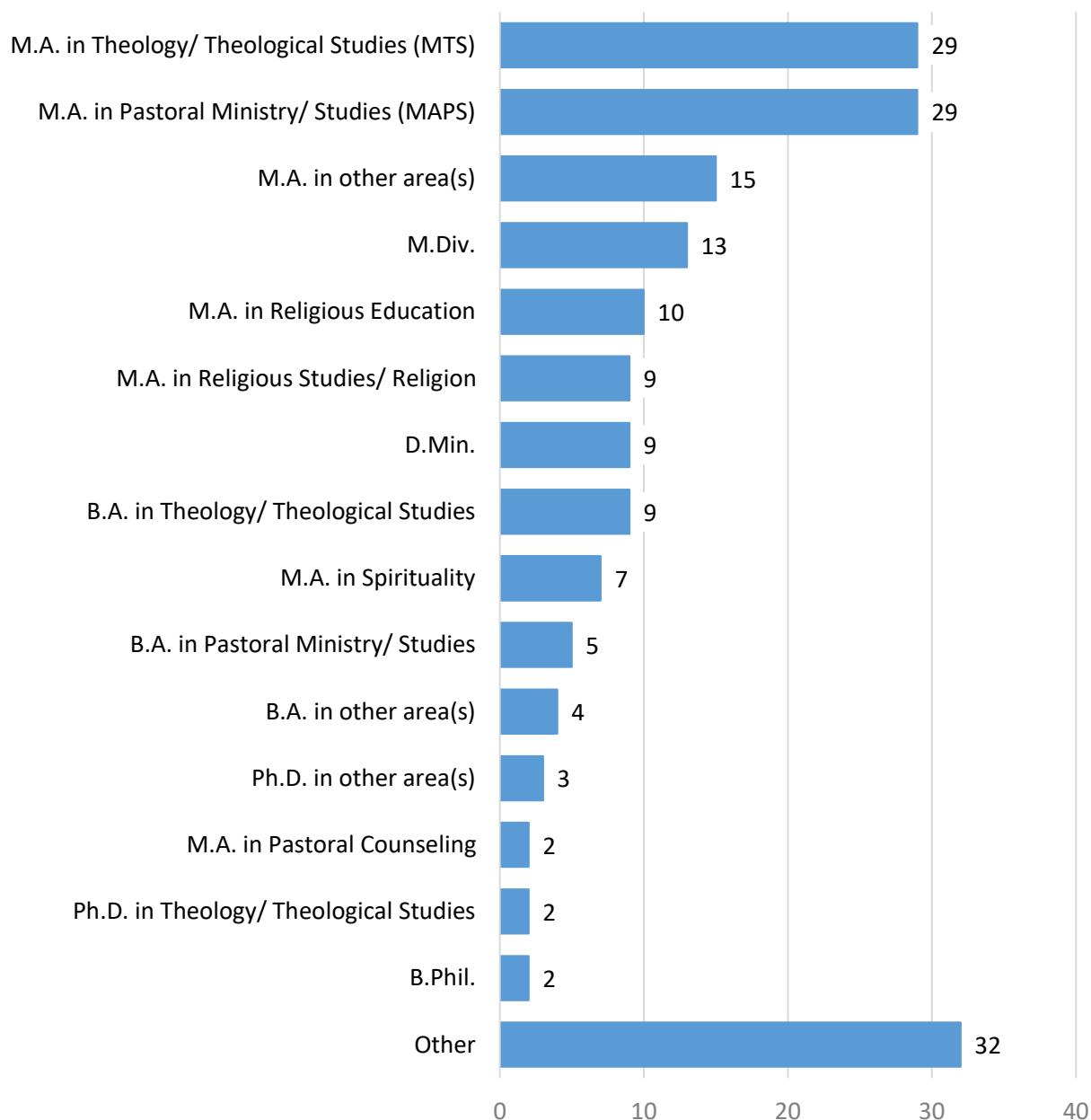


## Degrees Offered

Academic-based programs offer academic degrees but many also offer certificates. Similarly, diocesan-based programs affiliated with a seminary, college, or university typically offer opportunities for both academic degrees and certificates. Programs that are exclusively diocesan-sponsored typically offer only non-degree certificates.

Most of the degree-granting programs offer graduate degrees, although a few also grant associate or baccalaureate degrees. The most commonly offered degrees are listed below.

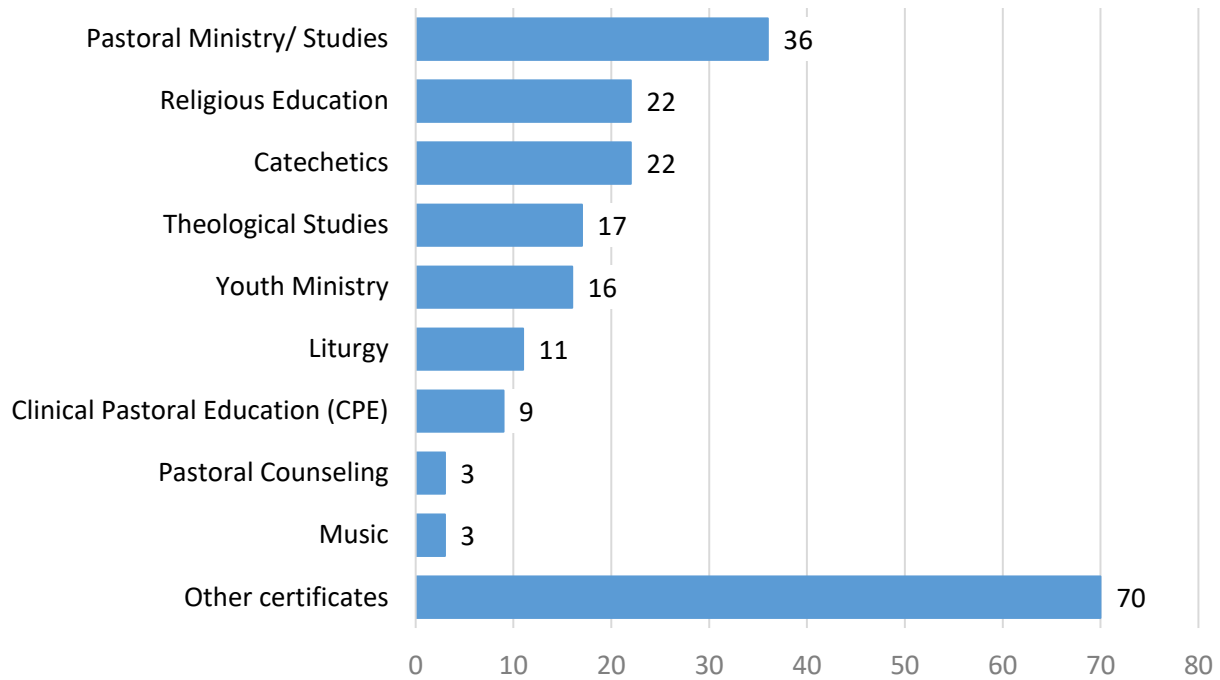
**Number of Degree Programs Available in Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation, 2022-2023**



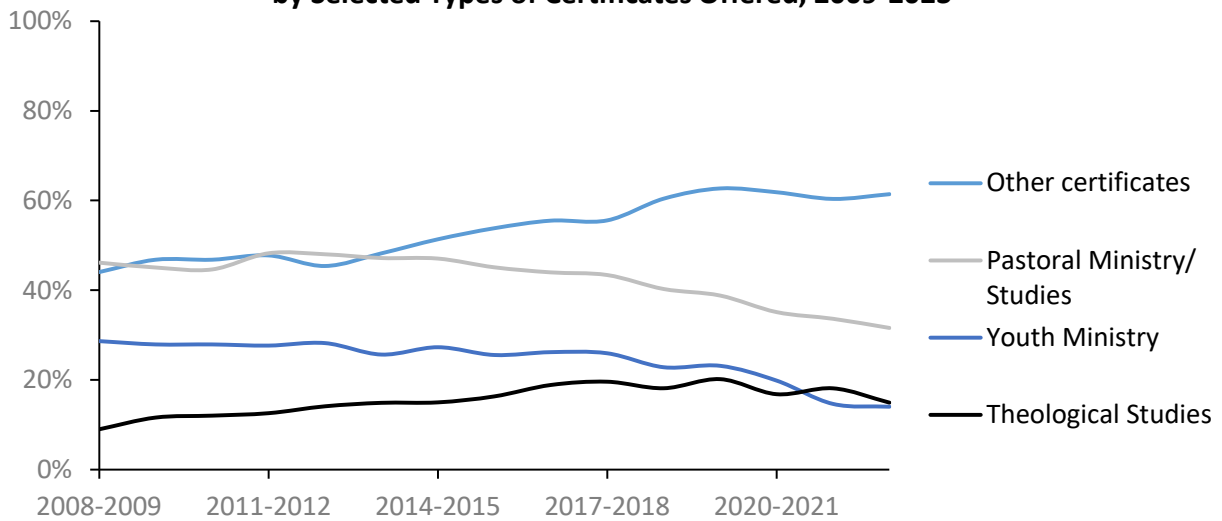
## Certificates Offered

Most lay ecclesial ministry programs grant certificates of completion. The most common certificate programs are listed below.

**Number of Certificate Programs Available in Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation, 2022-2023**



**Percentage Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Programs, by Selected Types of Certificates Offered, 2009-2023**





### Time of Instruction

Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation Programs are offered on various schedules.

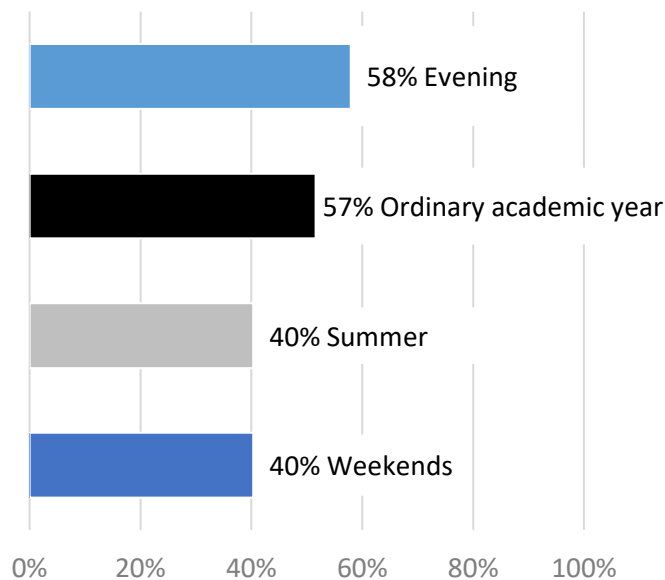
Three in five programs (58%) met in the evening, in 2022-2023 (and 57% a year before).

Three in five programs (57%) were scheduled during ordinary academic year, in 2022-2023 (and 59% a year before).

Two in five programs (40%) took place on weekends, in 2022-2023 (and 42% a year before).

Two in five programs (40%) were scheduled during summer, in 2022-2023 (and 34% a year before).

**Percentage of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation Programs, by When Instruction Takes Place, 2022-2023**



**Place of Instruction**

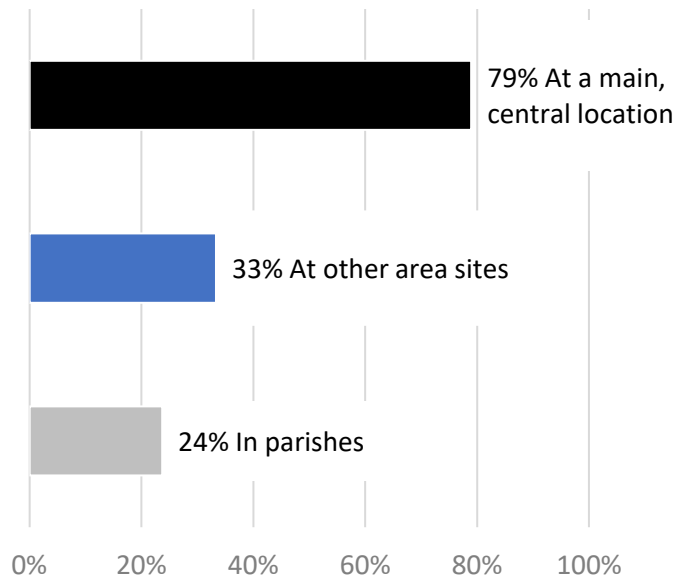
Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation Programs meet at different types of locations.

Four in five programs (79%) met at a main, central location, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 77% a year before). Since 2008-2009, their percentage averaged 76% and ranged between 72% and 85%.

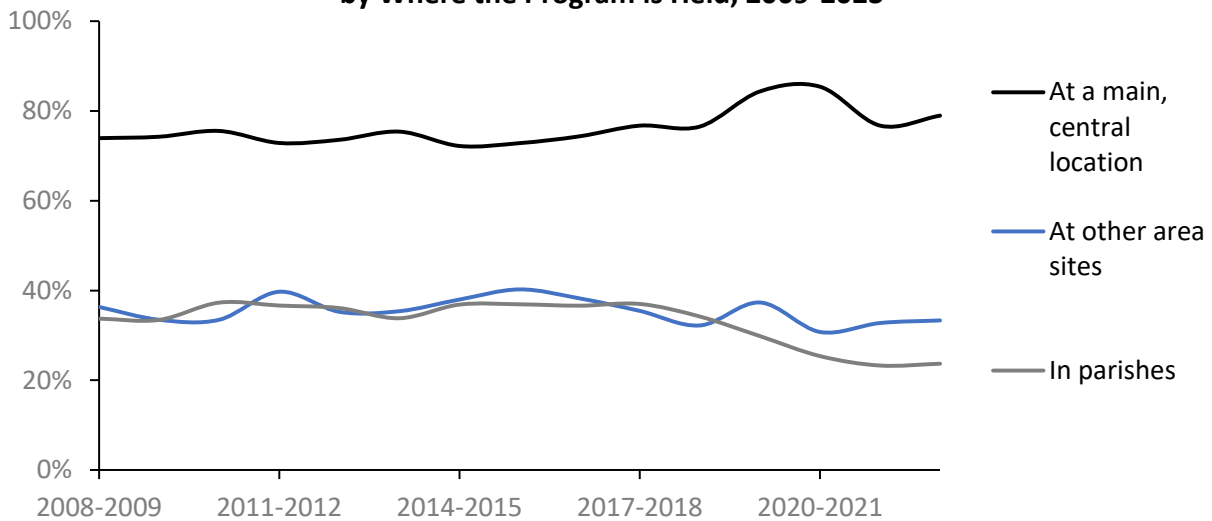
One in three programs (33%) met at other area sites, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 33% a year before). Since 2008-2009, their percentage averaged 35% and ranged between 31% and 40%.

One quarter of programs (24%) met in parishes, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 23% a year before). Since 2008-2009, their percentage averaged 33% and ranged between 23% and 37%.

**Percentage of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation Programs, by Where the Program is Held, 2022-2023**



**Percentage of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation Programs, by Where the Program is Held, 2009-2023**



## Online Components

To take advantage of the internet as a tool for expanding their reach to a wider audience, many programs offer some coursework online and some offer their entire program online.

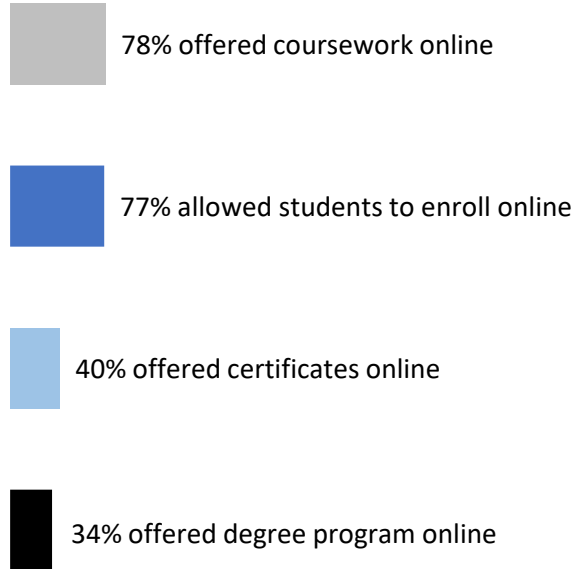
Four in five programs (78%) offered coursework online, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 77% a year before). Since 2006-2007, the percentage of programs in this category averaged 50% and ranged between 22% and 78%.

Three quarters of programs (77%) allowed students to enroll online, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 72% a year before). Since 2006-2007, the percentage of programs in this category averaged 55% and ranged between 32% and 77%.

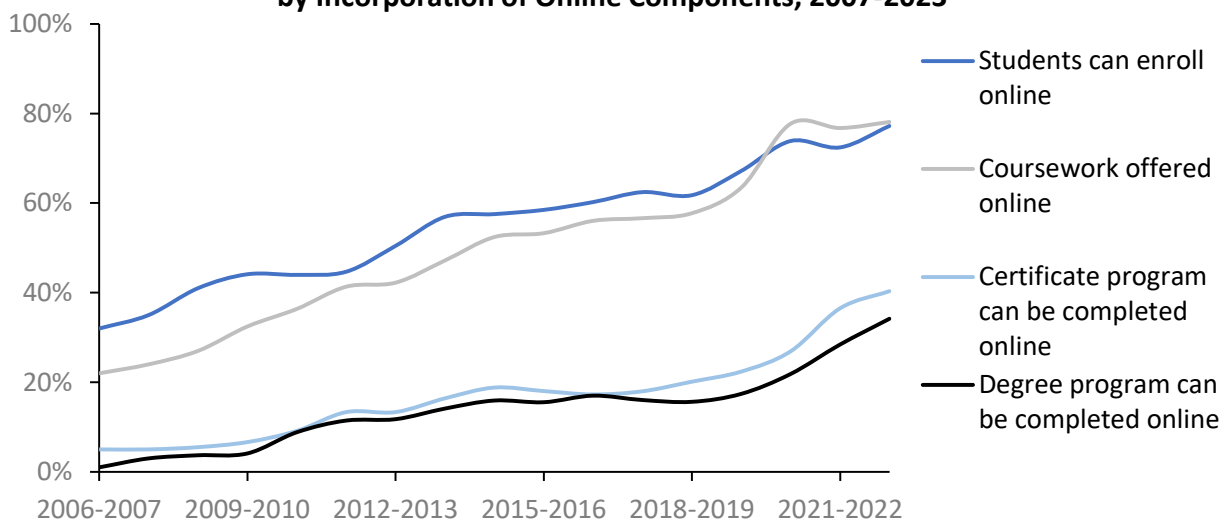
Two in five programs (40%) offered certificates online, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 37% a year before). Since 2006-2007, the percentage of programs in this category averaged 17% and ranged between 5% and 40%.

One in three programs (34%) offered degree program online, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 28% a year before). Since 2006-2007, the percentage of programs in this category averaged 14% and ranged between 1% and 34%.

### Percentage Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Programs, by Incorporation of Online Components, 2022-2023



### Percentage Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Programs, by Incorporation of Online Components, 2007-2023



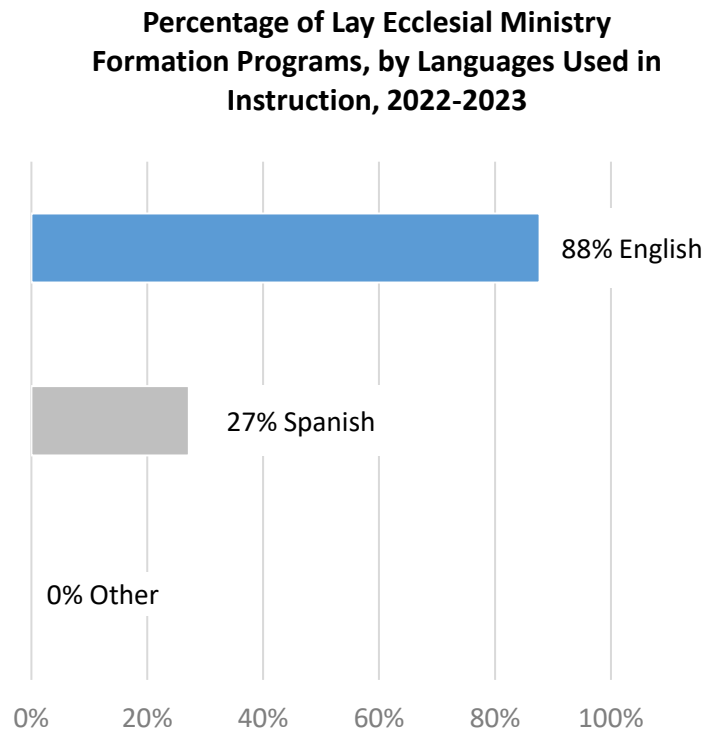
## Language of Instruction

Lay ecclesial ministry formation programs are conducted in a variety of languages.

Nine in ten programs (88%) were taught in English, in 2022-2023.

One quarter of programs (27%) were taught in Spanish, in 2022-2023 (and 28% a year before). Since 2008-2009, the percentage of these programs averaged 27% and ranged between 19% and 32%.

Virtually no programs that participated in the study this year (0%) were taught in languages other than English and Spanish, in 2022-2023 (and 1% a year before). Since 2008-2009, the percentage of these programs averaged 1% and ranged between 0% and 2%.



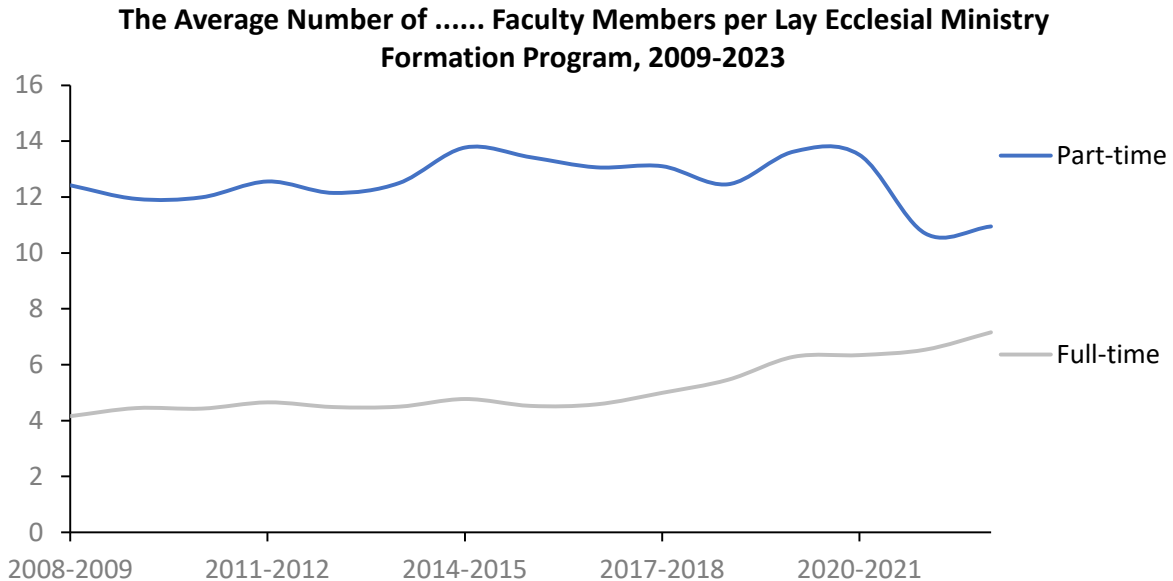
## Number of Faculty Members

Faculty of lay ecclesial ministry formation programs consists primarily of part-time faculty members.

	<b>Average [#]</b>	<b>Median [#]</b>	<b>Range [#]</b>
Full-time	7	4	0 - 51
Part-time	11	9	0 - 60

There were 11 part-time faculty members per program, on average, in 2022-2023 (about the same as in a year earlier). Half of the programs employed between 0 and 9 while the other half between 9 and 60 part-time faculty members. Since 2008-2009, the number of part-time faculty members averaged 13 and ranged between 11 and 14.

There were 7 full-time faculty members per program, on average, in 2022-2023 (an increase of 9% since a year earlier). Half of the programs employed between 0 and 4 while the other half between 4 and 51 full-time faculty members. Since 2008-2009, the number of full-time faculty members averaged 5 and ranged between 4 and 7.



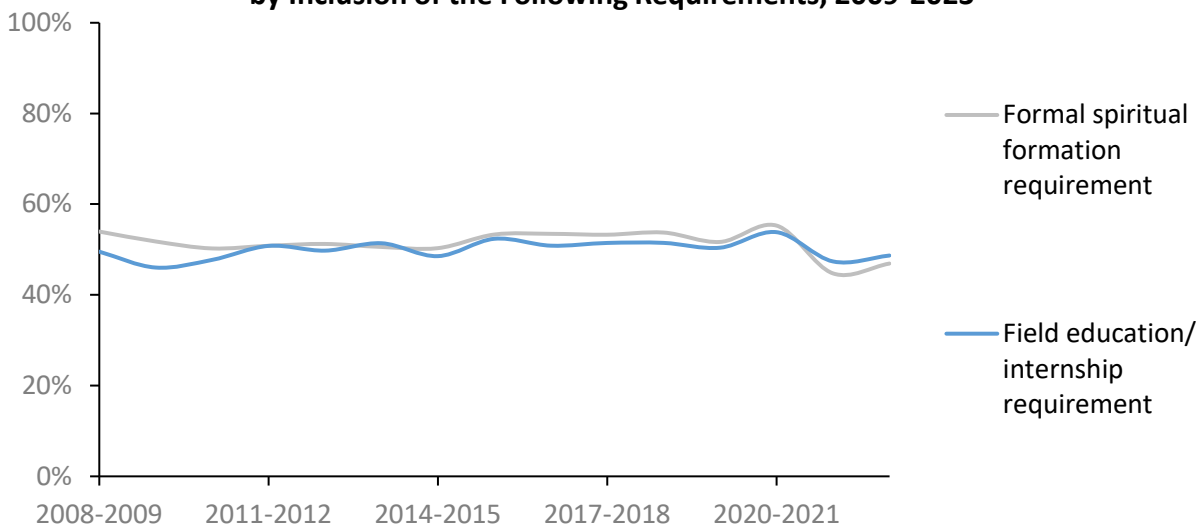
## Spiritual Formation and Field Education

Although academic formation is indispensable to lay ecclesial ministry formation, human, spiritual, and pastoral formation are also essential components of formation for ministry. The table below separates programs by type and displays the proportion within each type of program that requires a spiritual formation and field education components.

<b>Requirements of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Programs, 2022-2023</b>		
	<b>Spiritual Formation Component</b>	<b>Field Education/ Internship</b>
	[%]	[%]
Degree program associated with a Catholic seminary or school of theology - no certificates awarded	60	70
Degree program associated with a Catholic college or university - no certificates awarded	9	45
Combined degree and certificate program	47	44
Certificate program - no degrees awarded	52	48
<b>All Programs</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>49</b>

Half of programs (49%) required field education/ internship, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 47% a year before). Since 2008-2009, the percentage of programs with this requirement averaged 50% and ranged between 46% and 54%. If the trend continues, 53% programs  $\pm 4\%$  will require it, in 2027-2028. Half of programs (47%) required spiritual formation, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 45% a year before). Since 2008-2009, the percentage of programs with this requirement averaged 51% and ranged between 45% and 55%.

**Percentage Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Programs, by Inclusion of the Following Requirements, 2009-2023**



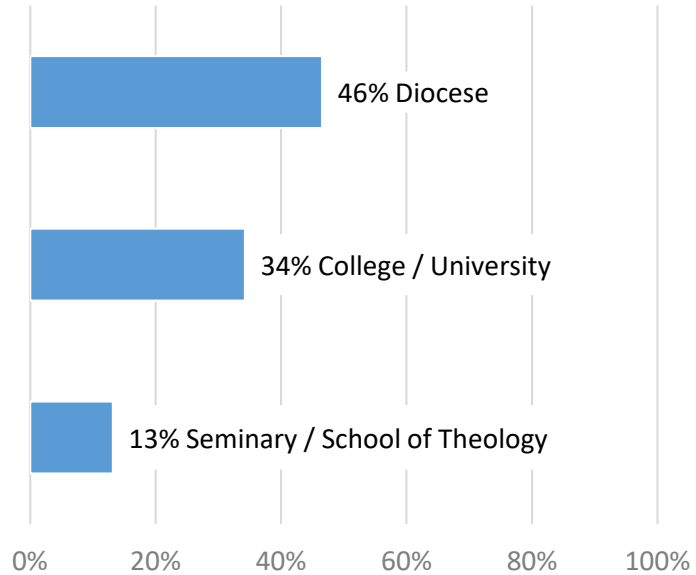
### Program Sponsors and Affiliates

Many programs can be classified as either exclusively diocesan-based or academic-based, but several are the result of collaboration between a diocese and an academic institution. In these cases, often the diocese assumes responsibility for the human, spiritual, and pastoral formation, while the academic institution is responsible for the intellectual formation.

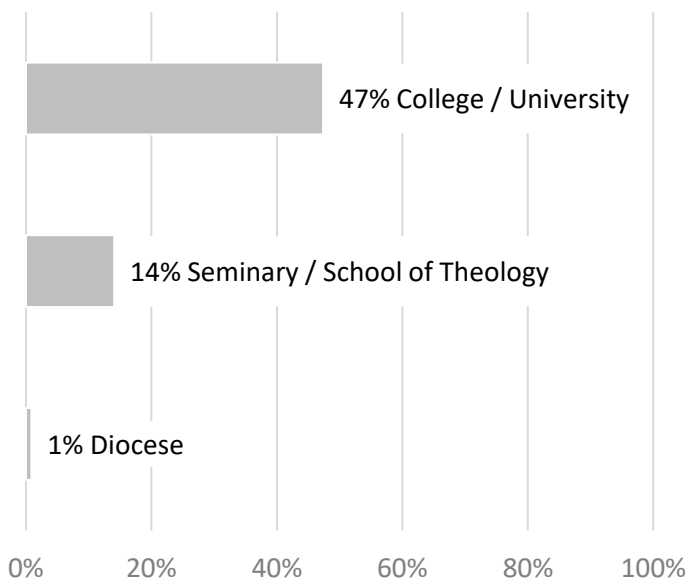
Half of the programs (46%) were sponsored by dioceses, in 2022-2023.

Half of the programs (47%) were affiliated with colleges / universities, in 2022-2023.

**Percentage of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Programs Sponsored by ... , in 2022-2023**



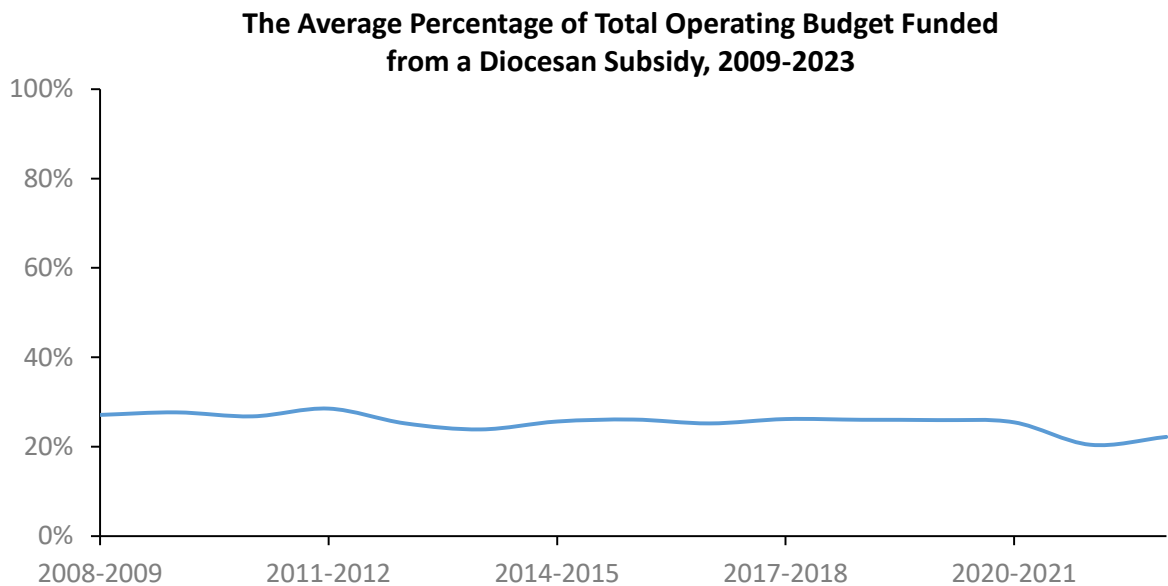
**Percentage of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Programs Affiliated with ... , in 2022-2023**



## Diocesan Subsidies

<b>The Percentage of Total Operating Budget Funded from a Diocesan Subsidy, 2022-2023</b>		
<b>Average</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Range</b>
<b>[#]</b>	<b>[#]</b>	<b>[#]</b>
22	0	0 - 100

On average, 22% of total operating budget came from a diocesan subsidy, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 20% a year earlier). Since 2008-2009, the subsidy averaged 26% and ranged between 20% and 29%. If the trend continues, the diocesan subsidy will constitute, on average, 22% of an operating budget  $\pm 3\%$  in 2027-2028.





## Costs per Student

The table below shows the cost of lay ecclesial ministry formation per student, in 2022-2023.

<b>The Cost of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation, per Student, in Current Dollars, 2022-2023*</b>			
	<b>Average</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Range</b>
	<b>[\$]</b>	<b>[\$]</b>	<b>[\$]</b>
Total cost	12,378	2,157	45 - 69,984
Per year	8,592	1,100	15 - 60,116
Per semester	5,673	3,124	45 - 30,058
Per credit hour	600	647	2 - 1,196

\* Responses equal to zero were removed from the analysis.

The average total cost was \$12,378 and the median was \$2,157.

The average cost per year was \$8,592 and the median was \$1,100.

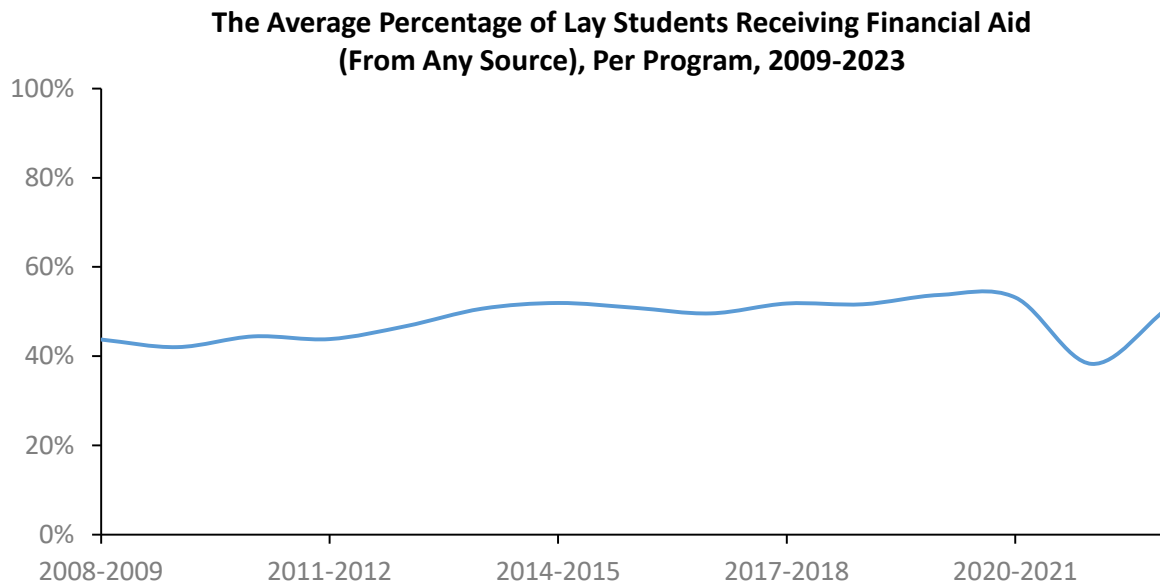
The average cost per semester was \$5,673 and the median was \$3,124.

The average cost per credit hour was \$600 and the median was \$647.

## Availability of Financial Aid

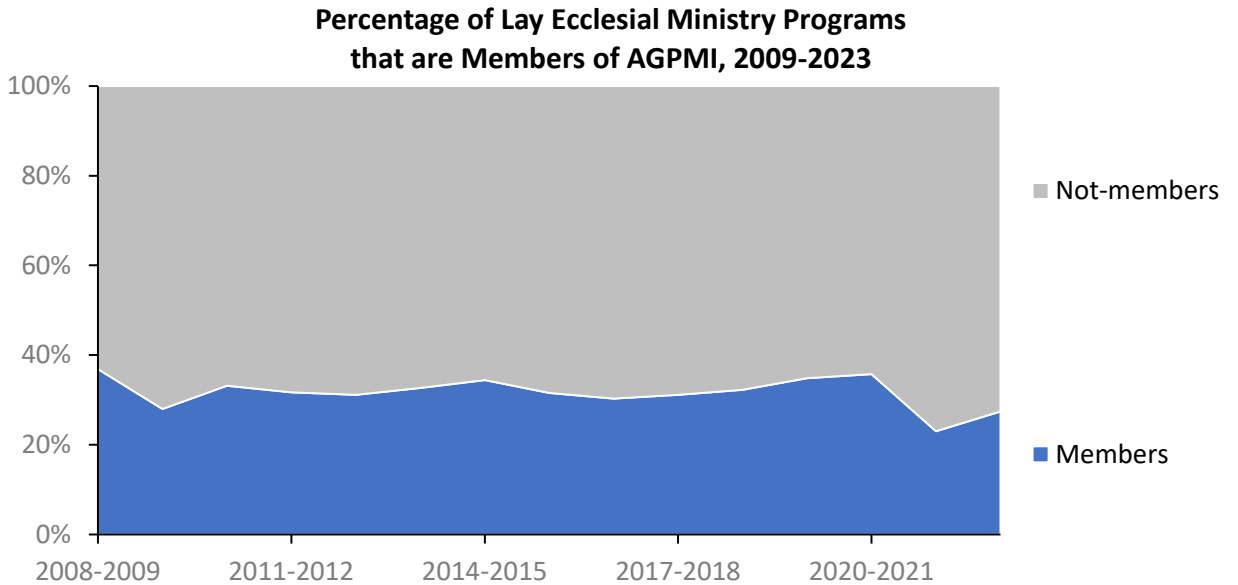
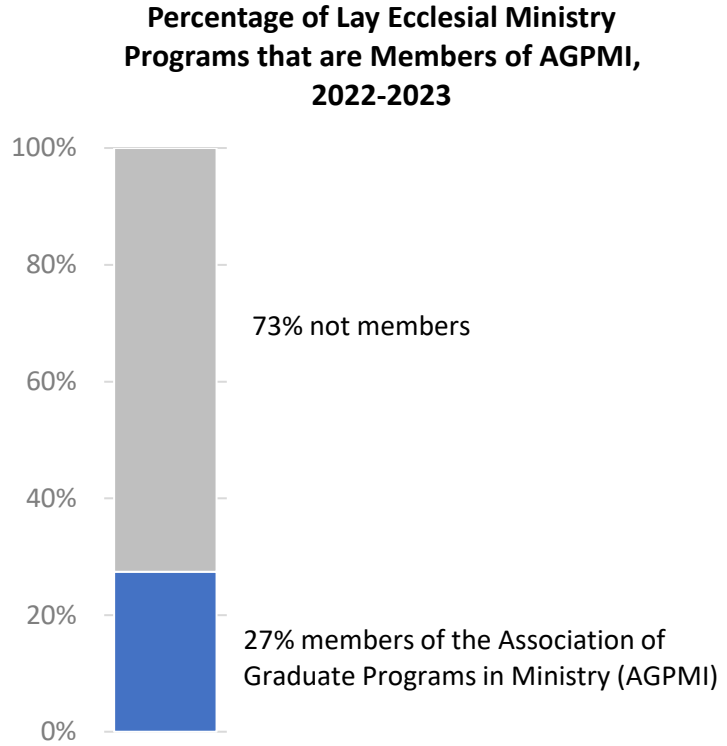
<b>The Percentage of Lay Students Receiving Financial Aid (From Any Source), Per Program, 2022-2023</b>		
<b>Average</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Range</b>
<b> [#]</b>	<b> [#]</b>	<b> [#]</b>
51	46	0 - 100

On average, 51% of lay students in a program received financial aid from any source, in 2022-2023 (an increase of 33% since a year earlier). Since 2008-2009, their percentage averaged 48% and ranged between 38% and 54%.



### Membership in the Association of Graduate Programs in Ministry

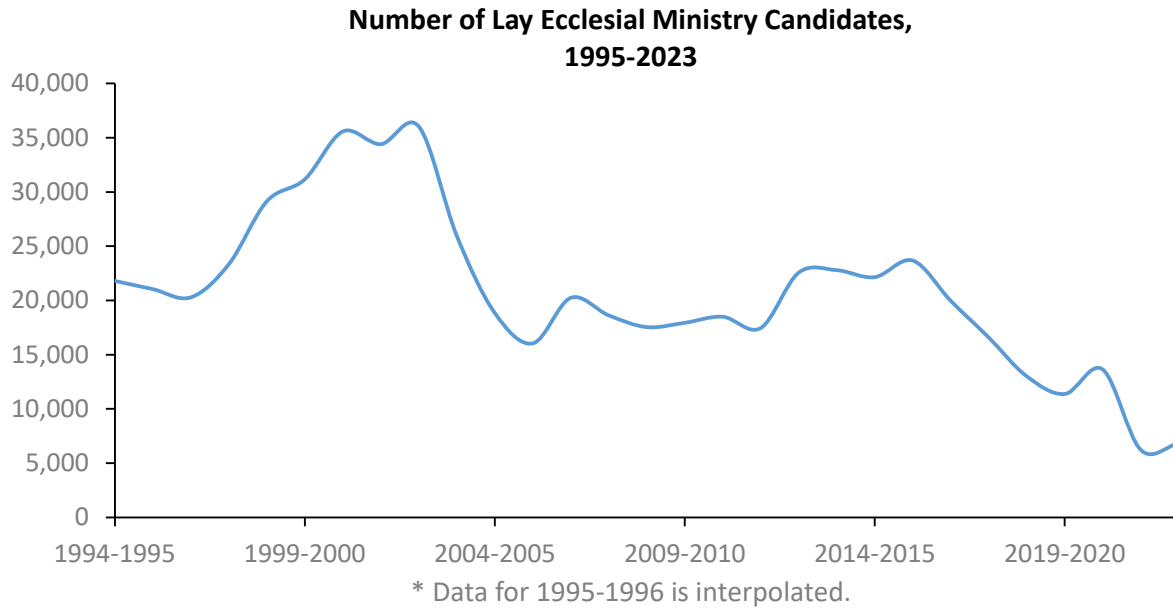
One quarter of programs (27%) were members of the Association of Graduate Programs in Ministry (AGPMI), in 2022-2023 (as compared to 23% a year before). Since 2008-2009, the percentage of members averaged 32% and ranged between 23% and 37%.



## Candidates to Lay Ecclesial Ministry

### Number of Candidates to Lay Ecclesial Ministry

In 2022-2023, there were reported 6,809 candidates to lay ecclesial ministry enrolled in formation programs (an increase of 9% since a year earlier). Since 1994-1995, their number averaged 20,783 and ranged between 6,225 and 36,048.



Reported enrollment in lay ecclesial ministry formation programs has fluctuated over the 36 years that the data have been collected. This fluctuation is partly a function of CARA’s work with the USCCB to distinguish more carefully lay ecclesial ministry formation from adult faith formation.<sup>1</sup> The second reason for the fluctuation is that the number of active programs offering formation in lay ecclesial ministry has also varied widely. CARA works throughout the year to identify new programs and to clarify the status of other programs that have been discontinued. The third reason has to do with the response rate from active programs. In some years (for example at the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic), this response rate is lower, which leads to (relatively) fewer reported candidates.

<b>Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation Programs with Highest Enrollment in Degree Programs, 2022-2023</b>		
	<b>Candidates for a Degree ↓</b>	<b>Certificate</b>
	[#]	[#]
Augustine Institute Graduate School of Theology, Colorado	563	13
M.A. Programs at Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio	335	0
Institute of Pastoral Studies, Loyola University of Chicago, Illinois	191	32
School of Theology and Ministry at Boston College, Massachusetts	190	33
Institute for Lay Ministry at the Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Michigan	155	96

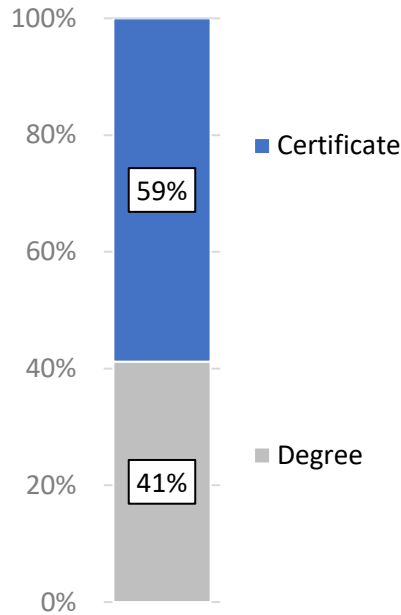
### Certificate and Degree Program Participants

Candidates in lay ecclesial ministry formation programs can be divided into two groups: those in certificate programs and those in degree programs.

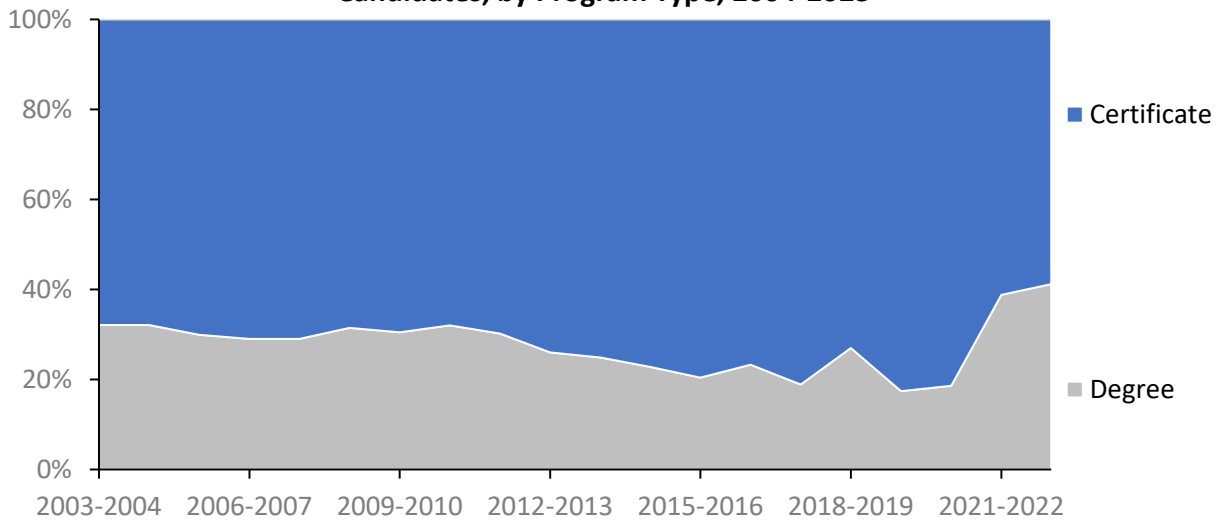
Candidates in certificate programs constituted 59% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023 (and 61% in 2021-2022). Their share in all programs averaged 72% and ranged between 59% and 83% since 2003-2004.

Candidates in degree programs constituted 41% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023 (and 39% in 2021-2022). Their share in all programs averaged 28% and ranged between 17% and 41% since 2003-2004.

**Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Candidates, by Program Type, 2022-2023**



**Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Candidates, by Program Type, 2004-2023\***



\* Data for 2007-2008 is interpolated.

## Number of Graduates

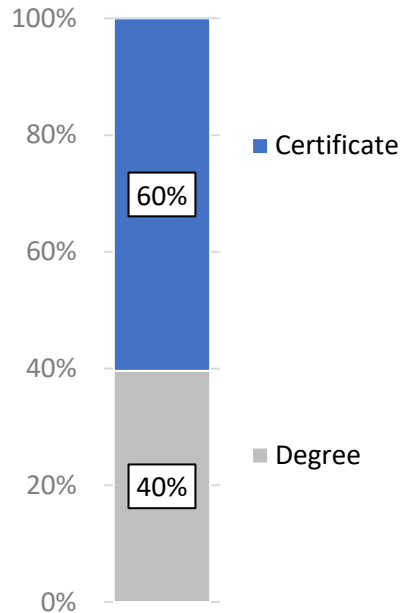
Lay ecclesial ministry formation programs reported 1,679 candidates who graduated in 2021-2022 (by comparison, they reported 2,303 graduations a year before). Since 2008-2009, the number of graduations averaged 6,914 and ranged between 1,679 and 11,575. In 2022-2023, there were expected to be 1,698 graduations from all programs.

Graduates from lay ecclesial ministry formation programs can be divided into two groups: those graduating from certificate programs and from degree programs.

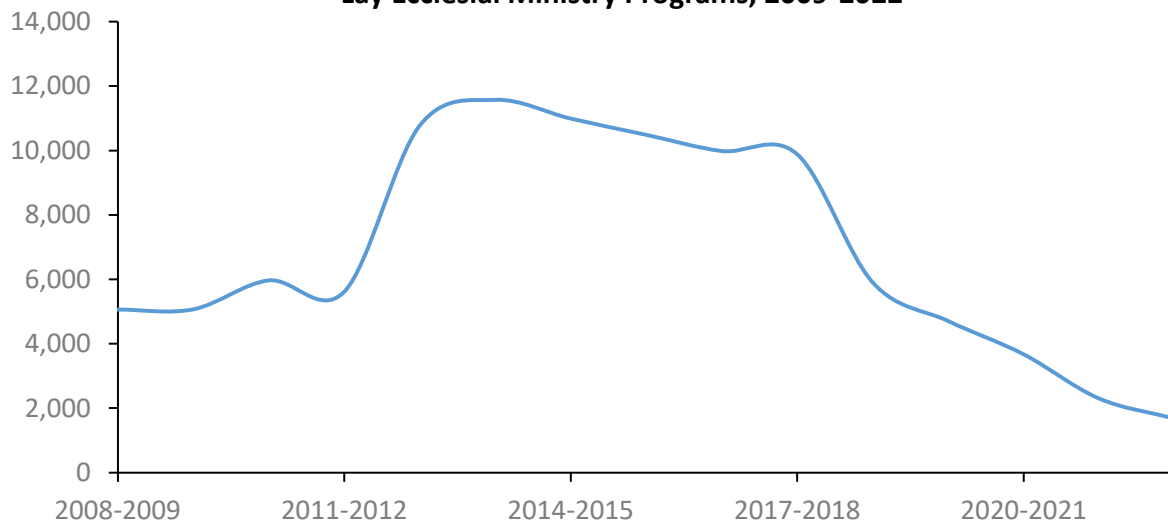
Among candidates enrolled in certificate programs, 21% were expected to graduate, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 26% a year before). Expected graduates in certificate programs constituted 60% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023 (and 70% in 2021-2022).

Among candidates enrolled in degree programs, 20% were expected to graduate, in 2022-2023 (as compared to 20% a year before). Expected graduates in degree programs constituted 40% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023 (and 30% in 2021-2022).

**Distribution of Expected Graduations from Lay Ecclesial Ministry Programs in 2022-2023 by Program Type**



**Distribution of Actual Graduations from Lay Ecclesial Ministry Programs, 2009-2022\***



\* Data for 2014-2015 (reported in 2015-2016) is interpolated.

## Ecclesial Status

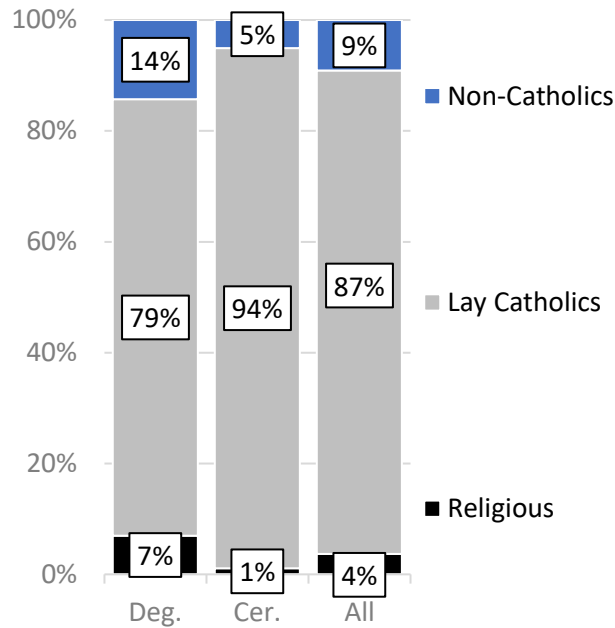
Candidates in lay ecclesial ministry formation programs can be divided into three groups: lay Catholics, non-Catholics, as well as men and women religious.

Lay Catholics constituted 87% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023. They represented a smaller fraction of candidates in degree programs (79%) than in certificate programs (94%). Their share in all programs averaged 91% and ranged between 86% and 93%, since 2003-2004. If the trend continues, they will constitute 89%  $\pm$  <1% of candidates in all programs, in 2027-2028.

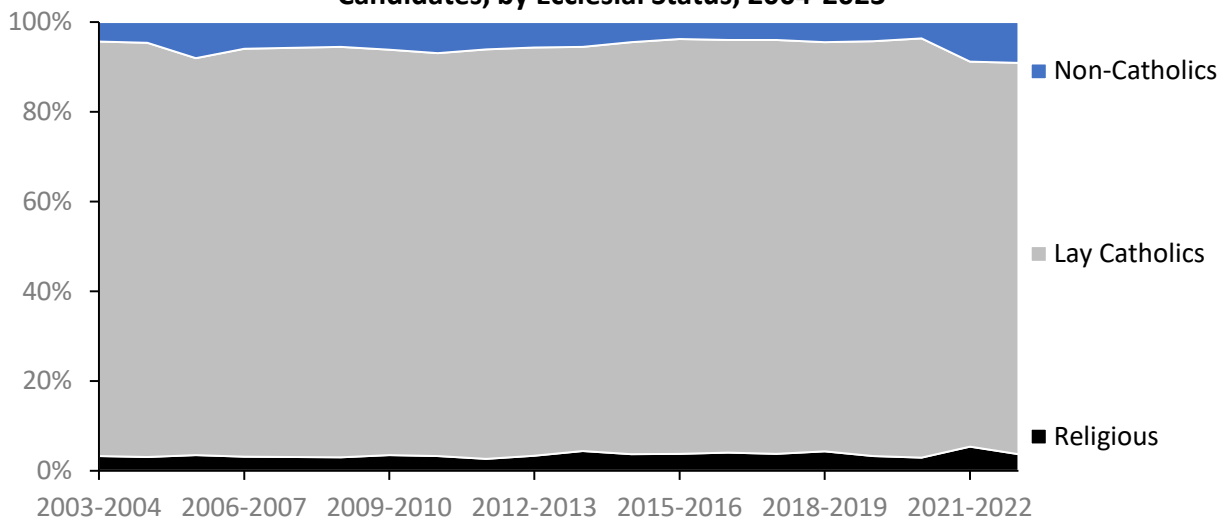
Non-Catholics constituted 9% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023. They represented a bigger fraction of candidates in degree programs (14%) than in certificate programs (5%). Their share in all programs averaged 6% and ranged between 4% and 9%, since 2003-2004. If the trend continues, they will constitute 8%  $\pm$  <1% of candidates in all programs, in 2027-2028.

Men and women religious constituted 4% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023. They represented a bigger fraction of candidates in degree programs (7%) than in certificate programs (1%). Their share in all programs averaged 4% and ranged between 3% and 5%, since 2003-2004. If the trend continues, they will constitute 4%  $\pm$  <1% of candidates in all programs, in 2027-2028.

**Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Candidates, by Ecclesial Status, 2022-2023**



**Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Candidates, by Ecclesial Status, 2004-2023**



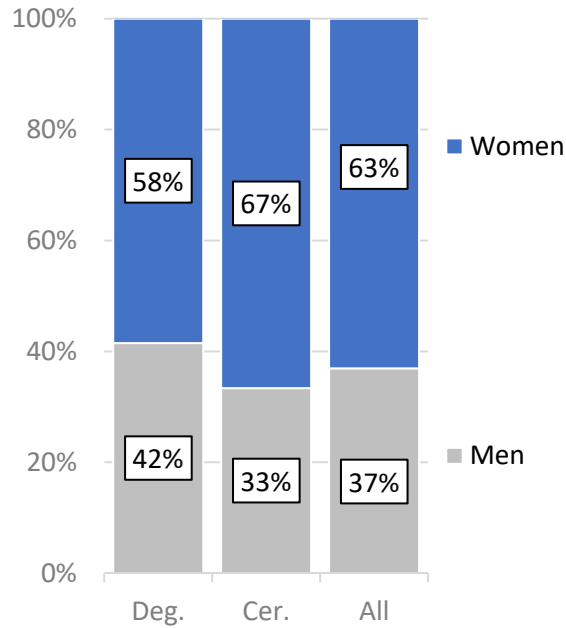
## Gender

Candidates in lay ecclesial ministry formation programs include both women and men.

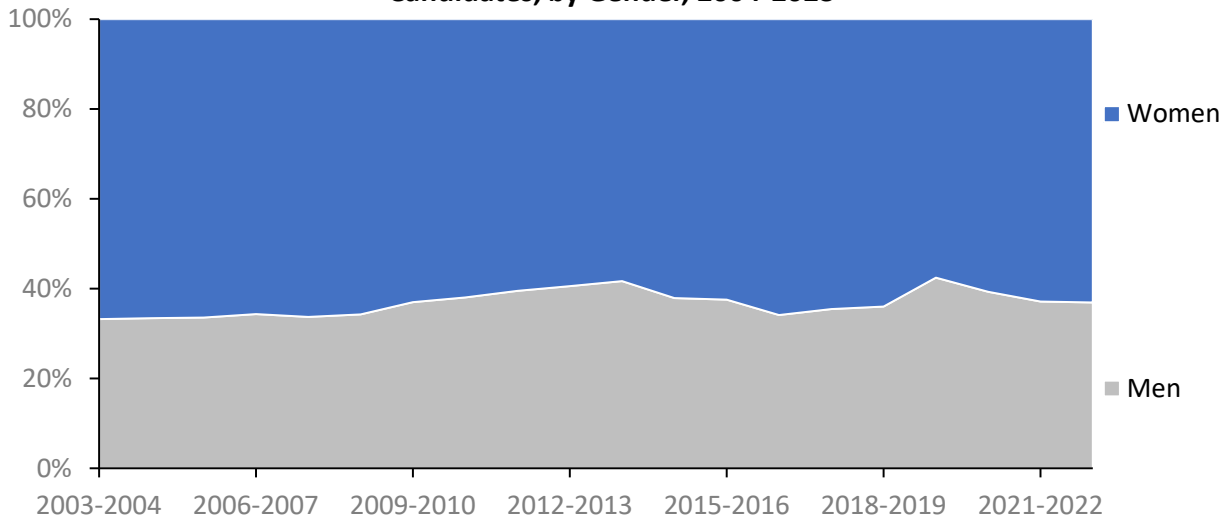
Women constituted 63% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023 (and 63% in 2021-2022). They represented a smaller fraction of candidates in degree programs (58%) than in certificate programs (67%). Their share in all programs averaged 63% and ranged between 58% and 67%, since 2003-2004.

Men constituted 37% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023 (and 37% in 2021-2022). They represented a bigger fraction of candidates in degree programs (42%) than in certificate programs (33%). Their share in all programs averaged 37% and ranged between 33% and 42%, since 2003-2004.

**Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Candidates, by Gender, 2022-2023**



**Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Candidates, by Gender, 2004-2023**





## Age

Candidates in lay ecclesial ministry formation programs range in age from under 30 years old to over 60.

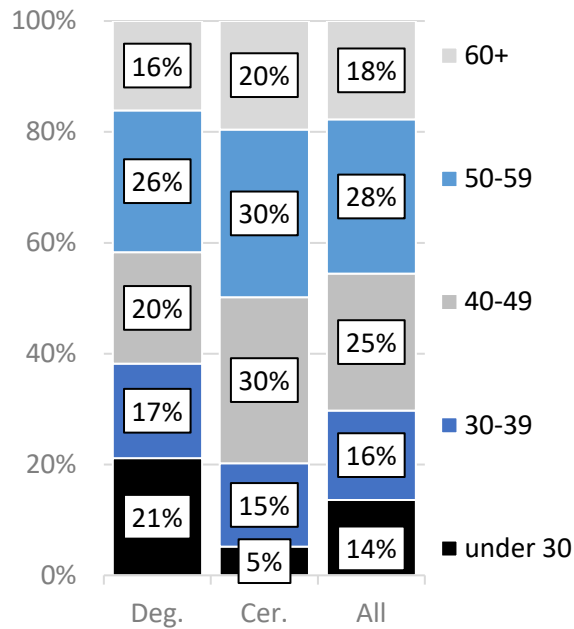
Candidates ages 50-59 constituted 28% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023. They represented a smaller fraction of candidates in degree programs (26%) than in certificate programs (30%). Their share in all programs averaged 27% and ranged between 23% and 32%, since 2002-2003. If the trend continues, they will constitute 24%  $\pm$  <1% of candidates in all programs, in 2027-2028.

Candidates ages 40-49 constituted 25% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023. They represented a smaller fraction of candidates in degree programs (20%) than in certificate programs (30%). Their share in all programs averaged 30% and ranged between 25% and 34%, since 2002-2003.

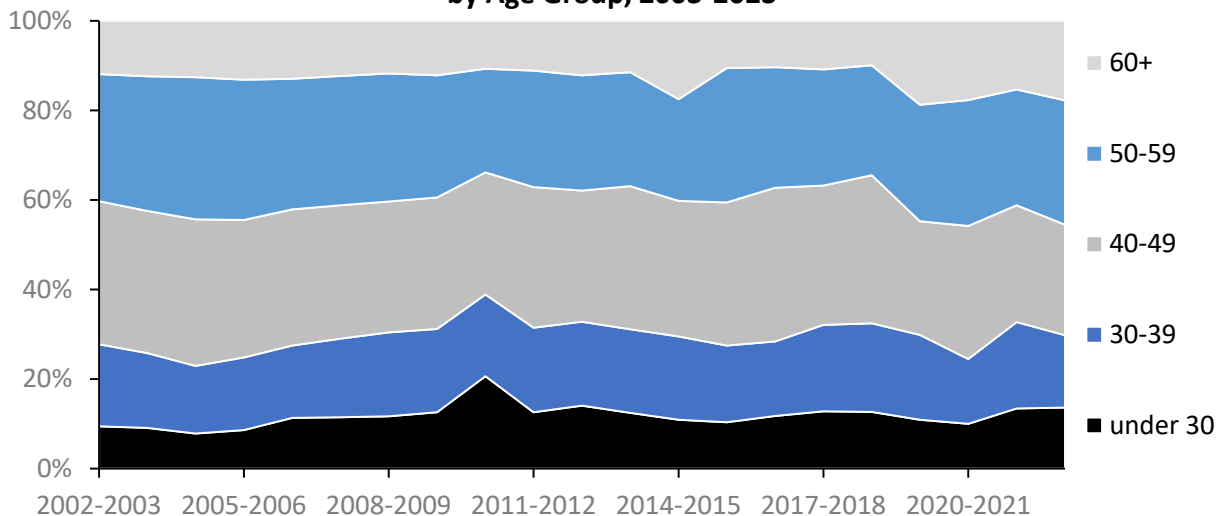
Candidates who were 60 or older constituted 18% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023. They represented a smaller fraction of candidates in degree programs (16%) than in certificate programs (20%). Their share in all programs averaged 13% and ranged between 10% and 19%, since 2002-2003.

Candidates ages 30-39 constituted 16% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023. They represented not significantly different fraction of candidates in degree programs (17%) than in certificate programs (15%). Their share in all programs averaged 18% and ranged between 14% and 20%, since 2002-2003.

**Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Candidates, by Age Group, 2022-2023**



**Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Candidates, by Age Group, 2003-2023**



## Race and Ethnic Background

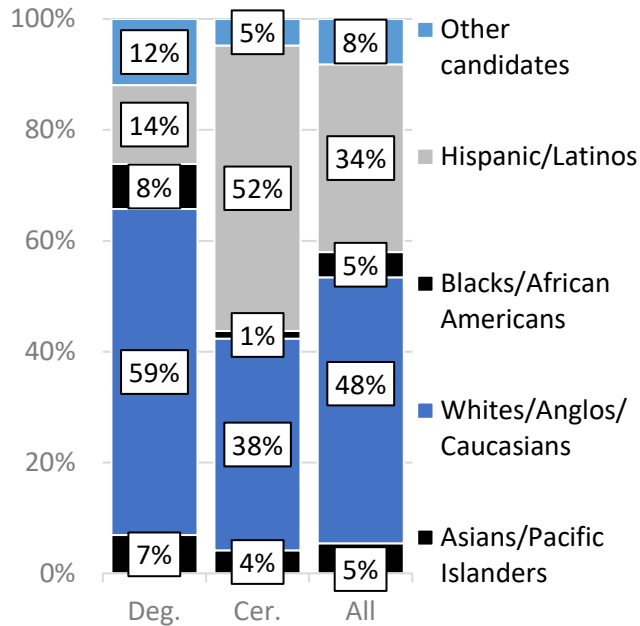
Candidates in lay ecclesial ministry formation programs can be divided between: Asians, Whites, Blacks, Hispanics/Latinos and others (which includes Native Americans).

Whites/Anglos/Caucasians constituted 48% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023. They represented a bigger fraction of candidates in degree programs (59%) than in certificate programs (38%). Their share in all programs averaged 53% and ranged between 36% and 79%, since 2002-2003.

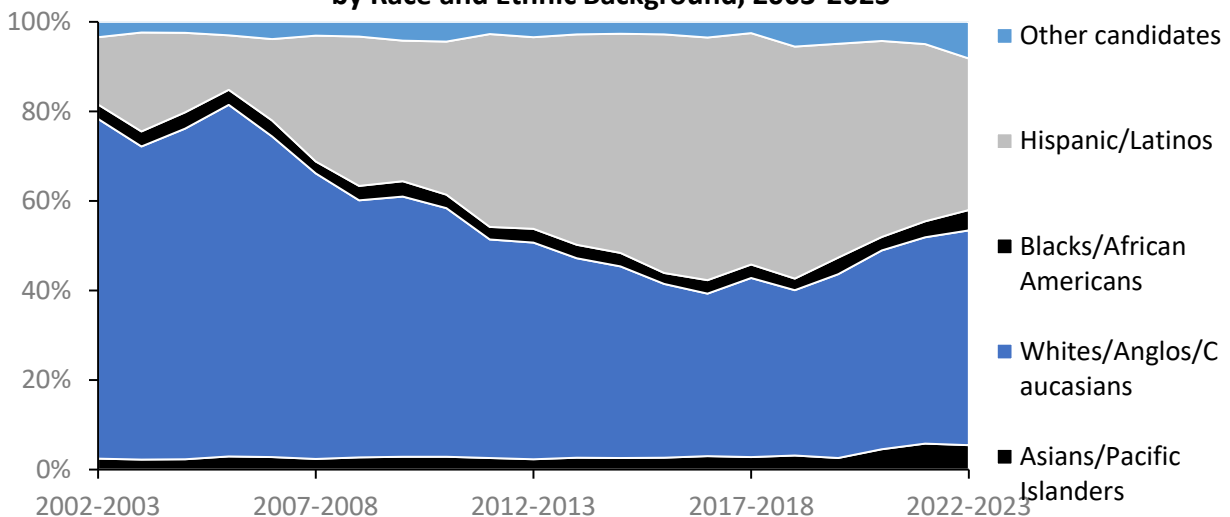
Hispanics/Latinos constituted 34% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023. They represented a smaller fraction of candidates in degree programs (14%) than in certificate programs (52%). Their share in all programs averaged 37% and ranged between 12% and 54%, since 2002-2003.

Other races and ethnicities not listed in the chart (including Native Americans, multi-racial, and international students that do not identify with these racial and ethnic categories) constituted 8% of candidates in all programs, in 2022-2023. They represented a bigger fraction of candidates in degree programs (12%) than in certificate programs (5%). Their share in all programs averaged 4% and ranged between 2% and 8%, since 2002-2003.

**Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Candidates, by Race and Ethnic Background, 2022-2023**



**Distribution of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Candidates, by Race and Ethnic Background, 2003-2023**



## **Methodology and End Notes**

CARA has been conducting studies of lay ministry formation programs nearly every year since 1994–1995.

The data are gathered in the fall of each year.

Tests for difference in proportions are only reported, if significance level is equal to or smaller than 0.05.

For the purpose of forecasting, confidence intervals are estimated using confidence level of 0.95. Forecasts are only included, if confidence interval is equal to or smaller than 5% of the forecasted amount.

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<sup>1</sup> Beginning in 2003-2004, CARA collaborated with the USCCB to improve the data collection so that participants in ministry formation programs who are preparing themselves for lay ecclesial ministry can be differentiated more accurately from those who are participating in these programs primarily for adult faith formation.