



Special Report

Placing Social Science Research at the Service of the Church in the United States Since 1964

Cultural Diversity in Vocations to Religious Life in the United States

Findings from a National Study of New Religious Members

Summer 2021

Over the past two years, CARA has been investigating the impact of increasing cultural diversity on religious institutes in the United States. Such research is particularly informative at this time of heightened attention on cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity in the nation.

In a 2019 CARA survey of religious priests, brothers, and sisters who entered their religious institute since 2003, respondents were asked to evaluate 20 aspects of their institute. Dead-last among the 20 aspects were the two directly related to cultural diversity:

- Diversity of cultures within the institute (28% rating it as “excellent”)
- Communal work around racism (18% rating it as “excellent”).¹

One woman religious, who had lived within her religious institute in communities in the United States as well as in other countries, wrote this regarding her hopes for the future of her institute:

I am a part of an international, multicultural community. From my experience in this country, we celebrate this diversity and strive to integrate our different prayer groups who speak different languages and have different cultural backgrounds with one another. Having also experienced my community charism outside my native culture in other countries, my hope is that we continue to learn how to grow in the area of multicultural community life. I pray we continue learning how we can enter other cultures and how we can receive missionaries from other cultures. These discussions already exist, but I believe we can go deeper.²

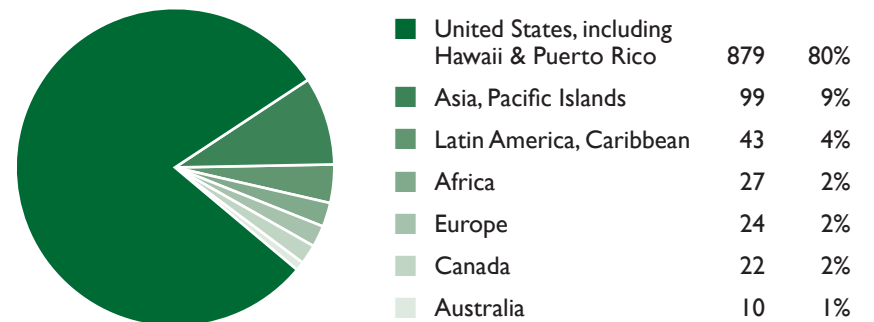
Noticeable in her observation is that cultural diversity is recognized among religious members as both a blessing and a challenge. To further investigate the phenomena of

men and women religious in increasingly culturally diverse religious institutes, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation commissioned CARA to conduct a 2020 survey of 3,196 religious priests, brothers, and sisters in the United States who entered their religious institute since 2005. The survey examined what impact parishes and family life have had on the vocational discernment of religious members before they entered religious life; what religious members’ experiences of cultural diversity within their religious institutes were; and what challenges such diversity was posing to individual members. Thirty-six percent (or 1,163) responded to the online survey.

Who Responded – Countries of Origin and Ethnic Backgrounds

Even though the 2019 and 2020 studies looked at slightly different populations,³ the countries of birth reported by responding religious and the racial/ethnic composition is very similar. Figure 1 shows the continents or countries of birth of responding religious to the current study, with most born in the United States (80%). They come from six of the world’s seven continents.

Figure 1. Regions of the World Where Religious Were Born
Number and percentage

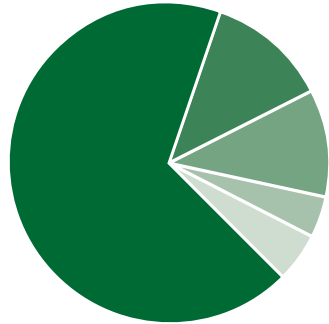


¹ Mary L. Gautier & Thu T. Do. 2020. “Recent Vocations to Religious Life: A Report for the National Religious Vocation Conference.” p. 119.

² Gautier & Do, p. 138.

³ The NRVC study surveyed those who had entered their institutes since 2003, while the Hilton Foundation study surveyed those who entered since 2005.

Figure 2. Ethnic Backgrounds
Number and percentage



Ethnic Background	Number	Percentage
Caucasian, European American, or white	795	68%
Asian, Pacific Islander, or Native Hawaiian	140	12%
Hispanic or Latino/a	132	11%
African, African American, or black	45	4%
Other or multiple ethnicities	55	5%

As shown in Figure 2, two-thirds of responding religious identify as white (68%), followed by Asian (12%), Hispanic (11%), black (4%), and all other ethnicities (5%).⁴

Responding religious' countries of birth are presented in Table 1, organized by their ethnic identification and by world regions. After the United States (879 respondents), the next most common countries of birth are

Table 1. Ethnicity by Place of Birth of Responding Religious Priests, Brothers and Sisters

Place of Birth	African, African American or black (N = 45)	Asian, Pacific Islander, or Native Hawaiian (N = 140)	Caucasian, European American, or white (N = 795)	Hispanic or Latino/a (N = 132)
Northern Americas (N = 901)	20%	25%	95%	62%
United States, incl. all U.S. territories (N = 879)	18%	24%	92%	62%
Canada (N = 22)	2%	1%	3%	0%
Asia or Pacific Islands (N = 99)	0%	70%	<1%	0%
Vietnam (N = 41)	0%	29%	0%	0%
Philippines (N = 28)	0%	20%	0%	0%
India (N = 5)	0%	4%	0%	0%
Other Asian countries (N = 15)	0%	11%	<1%	0%
Other Pacific Island countries (N = 10)	0%	6%	0%	0%
Latin America and Caribbean (N = 46)	18%	0%	0%	35%
Mexico (N = 26)	0%	0%	0%	19%
Dominican Republic (N = 8)	0%	0%	0%	6%
Haiti (N = 5)	9%	0%	0%	0%
Other Latin American countries (N = 3)	0%	0%	0%	9%
Other Caribbean countries (N = 4)	9%	0%	0%	1%
Africa (N = 27)	59%	2%	0%	1%
Cameroon (N = 6)	13%	0%	0%	0%
Nigeria (N = 5)	11%	0%	0%	0%
Kenya (N = 5)	11%	0%	0%	0%
Other African countries (N = 11)	24%	2%	0%	1%
Europe (N = 24)	0%	0%	4%	0%
Germany (N = 7)	0%	0%	1%	0%
United Kingdom (N = 5)	0%	0%	1%	0%
Other European countries (N = 12)	0%	0%	2%	0%
Australia (N = 10)	0%	2%	1%	0%
Unknown (N = 4)	3%	1%	0%	1%

⁴ Similarly, the NRVC study in 2019 had 70% of its respondents self-identify as white, 13% as Asian, 11% as Hispanic, 3% as black, and 3% as an "other" ethnicity. Mary L. Gautier & Thu T. Do. 2020. "Recent Vocations to Religious Life: A Report for the National Religious Vocation Conference." p. 66.

Vietnam (41), the Philippines (28), Mexico (26), Canada (22), and Australia (10). These various countries of birth show up also in their current legal statuses in the United States, with 45% of those religious born outside of the United saying they are U.S. citizens and about one in six or less saying they hold an F1 visa (16%), a green card (15%), or an R1 visa (15%). Another 9% say they have some “other” status.

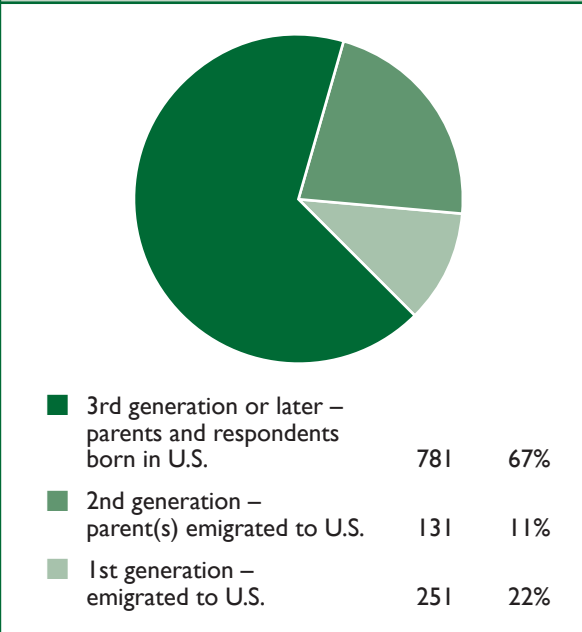
This table shows how different the country of birth is depending upon the ethnicity they identify. Some 82% of blacks (or 37 respondents) and 76% of Asians (or 106 respondents) were born outside of the U.S., compared to 8% of whites (or 64 respondents) and 38% of Hispanics (or 50 respondents).

Family Factors Affecting Vocational Discernment

Part of understanding how one’s family affects discernment of a vocation to religious life is knowing and understanding the ethnic or cultural backgrounds of the families. Also influential is what country the person was born in and/or how many generations ago they or their families emigrated to the United States. Figure 3 shows the number of respondents belonging to each generation. Two in three (67%) were born in the U.S. as were their parents (3rd generation or later), one in ten (11%) has one or two parents who emigrated (2nd generation), and about two in ten (22%) emigrated to the U.S. themselves (1st generation).

Table 2 shows how those of different ethnicities compare generationally. Blacks (80%) and Asians (75%) are most likely to be 1st generation, with whites (87%) most likely to be 3rd generation. Hispanics are more evenly split between the 1st (38%) and 2nd (41%) generations.

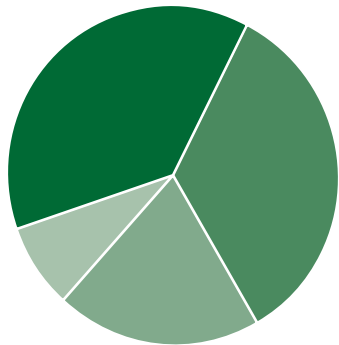
Figure 3. Generations from When Family Emigrated to the United States
Number and percentage



	African, African American or black (N = 45)	Asian, Pacific Islander, or Native Hawaiian (N = 140)	Caucasian, European American, or white (N = 795)	Hispanic or Latino/a (N = 132)
1st generation – Emigrated to U.S., born in a foreign country (N = 251)	80%	75%	8%	38%
2nd generation – Parent(s) emigrated to U.S. (N = 131)	4%	22%	5%	41%
3rd generation plus – Parents and respondent born in U.S. (N = 781)	16%	3%	87%	21%

Figure 4. Impact of their Family on their Vocational Discernment

Number and percentage



■ A great impact	425	38%
■ Some impact	386	34%
■ Little impact	225	20%
■ No impact	96	8%

As is shown in Figure 4, when asked how much of an impact they believe their family had on their discernment of a vocation to religious life, a combined seven in ten (72%) say that their family had “some” (34%) or “a great” (38%) impact on them. There is little difference in response between each generation of emigration (not shown).

There are seven factors (of 17 asked about) related to their families that at least four-tenths of any one of the generations’ respondents say had “a great impact” on them as they discerned their vocations (displayed in Table 3). Most of these factors concern regular Catholic family life, such as participating in parish life as a family, prayer as a family, and contact with priests and religious. The top three factors in the table are among

Table 3. While you were growing up in your family, how much impact did these factors have on your vocational discernment *before* you entered religious life?

Percentage responding “A great impact” only

	All Respondents (N = 1,163)	1st Generation (N = 251)	2nd Generation (N = 131)	3rd or Later Generation (N = 781)
Getting to know a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun beside family members	62%	55%	64%	63%
Attending Masses or other religious services as a family	60%	58%	63%	61%
My parents instilling in me a prayer life	51%	59%	53%	47%
Active participation in parish life as family	46%	48%	43%	47%
Sense of religiosity in my family	45%	50%	52%	42%
Daily prayers as a family	35%	45%	35%	31%
Volunteer or charitable service as a family	30%	40%	24%	28%

the most likely to have had “a great” impact, regardless of whether they are 1st, 2nd, or 3rd generation.

Generally, those who are of the 1st generation are most likely to say that many factors related to their family lives strongly impacted their discernment, with at least four-tenths saying each factor had “a great impact.”



This contrasts especially with those who are of 3rd or later generations, with fewer than a third saying the last two factors had “a great impact.”

Below are sample open-ended responses from the three kinds of generations regarding what aspects of their family life had the most impact on their vocational discernment:

My mom instilled a prayer life in me with daily family prayer and daily mass as a family. My dad read the bible many times and named me after a biblical figure in the OT. My dad instilled the importance of the crucifix to me when I was dating. My older sister encouraged my discernment and I feel safe sharing with her my discernment process. Going to Marian Days in 2013 as a family was the beginning of my vocation discernment. [1st generation woman religious from Vietnam.]



For many years my parents were involved in Marriage Encounters through the Christian Family Movement (Movimiento Familiar Cristiano). They led the marriage encounters for Spanish-speaking families and also facilitated group meetings for couples and families in various parishes to foster better communication skills between each other and with their children. As child, I was often involved in some of the programs they did: cultural festivals, cultural performances, Christmas plays, meetings specific to parents and children. [2nd generation Hispanic male religious whose parents emigrated from South America.]

My mother prayed with me every night when I was little, and took my sister and I to Eucharistic Adoration often. In this way I learned to trust God, from the little things to the big things. I was consecrated to Mary with my sister when I was young, and when I was a little older there was this particular statue of Our Blessed Mother towards the center of our house that, I think, reminded me of that and always pointed my mind to the higher things. Through Mary and a growing trust in the Lord, I grew in desiring to just give my life to God. [3rd or later generation white woman religious.]

Table 4. Influential Parish's Location and the Ages When They Attended It by Ethnicity

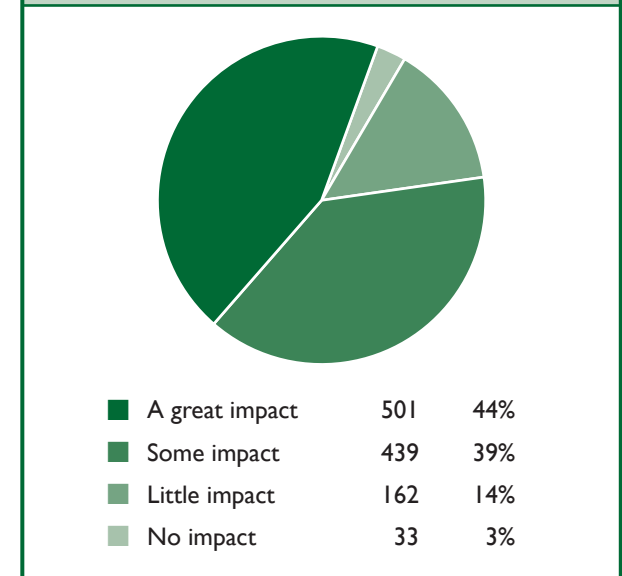
	All	Black	Asian	White	Hispanic
U.S. Parish	(N = 919)	(N = 13)	(N = 78)	(N = 730)	(N = 98)
High school age or younger	30%	23%	25%	30%	37%
Ages 18 and above	44%	62%	58%	43%	40%
Both of the above	26%	15%	17%	27%	23%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Foreign Parish	(N = 149)	(N = 30)	(N = 54)	(N = 38)	(N = 27)
High school age or younger	50%	57%	67%	29%	33%
Ages 18 and above	27%	20%	22%	42%	26%
Both of the above	23%	23%	11%	29%	41%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Parish Factors Affecting Vocational Discernment

Responding religious were asked to write in the name and the city of the parish that had the greatest impact on their discernment of a vocation. Table 4 shows when they encountered that parish as well as whether that parish was in the U.S. (86%) or elsewhere (14%). For those at U.S. parishes (including campus ministries), respondents of every ethnic group except Hispanics are significantly more likely to have attended the parish as adults. Among those identifying a foreign parish, on the other hand, blacks, Asians, and Hispanics are relatively more likely to have attended the parish as children.

As is shown in Figure 5, a combined 83% say that a parish had “some” (39%) or “a great” (44%) impact on their vocational discernment, with little difference between those identifying an influential parish in the U.S. and those identifying one elsewhere (not shown). This is 11 percentage points greater than respondents gave for how much of an impact their families had on their discernment (see Figure 4).

Figure 5. Impact of a Parish on their Vocational Discernment
Number and percentage



**Table 5. Thinking of the parish you named above, how much impact did these factors have on your vocational discernment before you entered religious life?
Percentage responding “A great impact” only**

	All (N = 1,135)	U.S. Parishes (N = 979)	Foreign Parishes (N = 154)
Masses and liturgies at the parish	62%	61%	67%
Clergy at my parish supporting and encouraging me to discern my religious vocation	50%	50%	54%
Participating in the liturgical ministry at the parish (e.g., lector, extraordinary minister, music)	48%	46%	64%
Witnessing the presence of religious sisters, or brothers, or priests in the parish	46%	44%	54%
Conversations with priests or religious brothers or sisters at the parish	45%	44%	49%
Individual parishioners supporting and encouraging me to discern my religious vocation	41%	40%	47%
Overall support and encouragement from the parish	41%	39%	54%
Masses and liturgies in the language of my ethnic/cultural heritage at the parish	35%	30%	60%
Service opportunities	34%	32%	47%
Prayer groups at this parish	31%	29%	43%
Its ministry and formation programs for teenagers, ages 13-17	27%	25%	39%
Adult faith formation in this parish	25%	47%	25%
Celebrating ethnic Catholic traditions at the parish	25%	21%	50%
Devotion to a saint of my ethnicity/culture at the parish	16%	13%	37%

The 14 parish factors listed in Table 5 are those that a third or more of responding religious say had “a great” impact on their discernment of a vocation to religious life. Summarizing the factors, they relate to encouragement and support from leaders and others at the parish and participation in regular parish activities. With only one exception (adult faith formation in the parish), those who identified a foreign parish are more likely to list a factor as having had “a great” impact than those identifying a U.S. parish. Also noteworthy, the three factors in the table below that specifically mention ethnicity (ethnic Catholic traditions, language Masses are celebrated in, and devotion to an ethnic saint) have much higher percentages citing “a great” impact among those identifying a foreign parish than those identifying a U.S. parish. Thus, the location of the parish has a correlation with how much of an impact many factors had on respondents.

In response to an open-ended question about what aspect of their influential parish had the most impact on their vocational discernment, a respondent from a U.S. parish and from a foreign parish describe their experiences below.

The presence of the Dominican friars and sisters made religious life seem normal, approachable, and something that I could see myself doing one day. We also had a tremendous youth group that helped me to grow in my faith to the point where I was open to discerning a religious/priestly vocation. [3rd generation or later male religious who attended an influential U.S. parish before he was an adult.]

In my parish we had a vocation group that encourages vocations to priesthood, brotherhood and religious vocations. We do visit convents and seminary houses. This helped me to build up my faith and the desire to seek out what my real vocation is. I got myself in the dream. [1st generation woman religious who is an emigrant from an African country and who attended an influential foreign parish as an adult.]

Openness of their Religious Institute to Cultural Diversity

Respondents were also asked to describe the ethnic make-up of the religious community where they currently live, being invited to “check all that apply” to each of the options shown in Table 6. Half live in a community with members from many different cultural/ethnic backgrounds (50%), with male religious especially likely to report living in such a community. Nearly half live in a community with at least one other member of the same cultural/ethnic background as their own (48%). About one in 20 lives in a community where they are the only one from their culture/ethnicity (7%). As will be seen, these living situations have an effect on their experience of their religious institutes in regard to cultural diversity.

Table 6. Which of these best describes your current living situation?

Respondents were invited to “check all that apply”

	All (N = 1,163)	Men (N = 545)	Women (N = 618)
I live in a community with members from many different cultural/ethnic backgrounds	50%	59%	42%
I live in a community with at least one other member of the same cultural/ethnic background as mine	48%	45%	50%
I live in a community in which I am the only one whose culture is different from the dominant ethnic/racial cohort	7%	5%	9%

Table 7. In your experience, how open is your institute to the followings?

Percentage responding “Very” Open only

	All (N = 1,135)	Live in a Community with Many Cultures (N = 580)	Community with at Least One Other Member of their Ethnicity (N = 554)	Community Where Respondent Only Member of their Ethnicity (N = 79)
Accommodating family visit(s) for those whose families live in another country	69%	75%	66%	71%
Welcoming those in initial formation who are from cultures different from the dominant ethnic/racial group of the institute	68%	78%	64%	64%
Recruiting candidates from cultures different from the dominant ethnic/racial group of the institute	66%	77%	62%	63%
Celebrating the feast day of the patron saint of another country or culture	65%	73%	65%	43%
Encouraging members to learn another language	64%	72%	63%	51%
Encouraging members to share their culture in community life	61%	72%	58%	71%
Integrating foods from other cultures into the community's meals	59%	71%	57%	38%
Openly discussing cultural differences	54%	63%	52%	47%

Religious were also asked how open they consider their religious institute is in 19 areas, all related to cultural diversity among its members or candidates. Table 7 displays the eight areas that respondents are most likely to say are “very” open in their religious institute. The different columns show what kind of community the respondents currently live in. All eight areas have more than half of respondents overall saying that their institute is “very” open in this way. That said, the final column – showing the responses from those who are the sole members living in their community from their ethnic background – has, in comparison, significantly lower responses in some of the areas: encouraging members to learn another language (51%), celebrating the feast day of the patron saint of another country or culture (43%), and integrating foods from other cultures into the community’s meals (38%).



Table 8. In your experience, how open is your institute to the followings?
Percentage responding "Not at All" or "A Little" Open, combined

	All (N = 1,135)	Live in a Community with Many Cultures (N = 580)	Community with at Least One Other Member of their Ethnicity (N = 554)	Community Where Member is Only One of their Ethnicity (N = 79)
Using a prayer practice from another culture	42%	35%	47%	50%
Celebrating with ethnic dance or song	41%	34%	44%	45%
Establishing a discernment group with people of diverse cultures	41%	32%	45%	43%
Providing an acculturation program for new members from outside the United States	40%	26%	43%	49%
Having bi-lingual or multilingual prayers	38%	30%	43%	47%
Providing a mentor from the same culture, if possible, for those in initial formation	38%	29%	39%	53%
Accepting candidates with limited English skills	34%	23%	40%	38%

While Table 7 shows the areas where religious institutes are "very" open, Table 8 shows the seven areas most in need of improvement.

Note, again, how differently those living in different kinds of communities respond. While only about a quarter to a third of those who live in a community with many cultures say their institute is "not at all" or "a little" open in these areas, about four-tenths to half of those who are the sole member of their ethnic group say the same. The areas where about half of those who are the sole members of their ethnic group say are not adequately open are: providing a mentor from the same culture for those in initial formation (53%), using a prayer practice from another culture (50%), providing an acculturation program from new members outside

of the U.S. (49%), and having bi-lingual or multilingual prayers (47%).

Religious were further invited to write in what their religious institute could do to better accommodate new members from different cultures. The three responses below come from those living in the three different types of community and focus on those with grievances rather than those saying their institutes are already succeeding at being open.

By actively seeking to learn about the other culture where the members are from. By adapting existing rules/guidelines to fit the reality of those from other cultures because not always does one size fit all. By having members take joint vacation once in a while to visit and get to know the culture of

another member. By adapting the food menu to include food from the other member's culture. By providing a proper orientation program for newcomers. By setting realistic expectations. [A 1st generation male religious emigrant from an African country who lives in a community with many ethnicities.]

Encourage open and honest conversation with members from different cultures. Some of the newer members feel unheard or misunderstood many times. [2nd generation Asian woman religious who lives in a community with at least one other member of her ethnic background.]

They could ask questions about my culture, and how we might learn together from each other. They could stop themselves from viewing me as a "bad American". I am white and have no accent, so they see me as American, but with "problematic" behaviors because of my culture, which they don't know or understand, because they haven't asked. They could be open to change and listening to how we need to change as a congregation. [1st generation male religious emigrant whose parents come from a North American and a European country who lives in a community where he is the sole member of his ethnic group.]



Table 9. Since you entered your religious institute, how much of a challenge is each of these to you personally?
Percentage responding "Somewhat" or "Very Much" of a Challenge, combined

	All (N = 1,135)	Live in a Community with Many Cultures (N = 580)	Community with at Least One Other Member of their Ethnicity (N = 554)	Community Where Member is Only One of their Ethnicity (N = 79)
Feeling isolated or lonely	21%	19%	22%	28%
Members who I live with not understanding my culture	19%	19%	13%	49%
Not feeling understood by other members of my institute	19%	16%	20%	32%
Members who I live with not accepting my culture	12%	10%	9%	28%
During my initial formation, my formator requiring me to accommodate my culture to that of my institute	10%	10%	7%	20%
Feeling that I am asked too much to accommodate my culture to fit in the dominant ethnic/racial cohort of my institute	9%	8%	5%	23%
My food not being welcome in my community	8%	6%	6%	23%

Cultural Challenges Members Face in their Religious Institute

Finally, religious were asked, since entering their religious institute, how much of a challenge they face in 14 areas. Shown in Table 9 are those areas respondents are most likely to say are "somewhat" or "very much" a challenge to them. The situations below are especially a challenge for those who are the sole member of their ethnicity in the community where they live; 49% of these respondents, for example, say not having their

fellow members understand their culture is at least "somewhat" of a challenge to them. Further, about three in ten say that not feeling understood by other members (32%), feeling isolated or lonely (28%), and members they live with not accepting their culture (28%) are at least "somewhat" of a challenge.

Religious living in each of the three types of community were invited to write in the greatest challenges they face in religious life related to their ethnic heritage:

My family and cultural upbringing have taught me to defer to older people. In U.S. culture, most are taught to speak freely and outspokenly and expect others to do the same. So sometimes during discussions, it is difficult to overcome this cultural trait. [1st generation male religious who emigrated from an Asian country who lives in a community with many cultures.]

(a) Some sisters expecting me to consider myself to be an American too quickly. I think it's a fair expectation but has to evolve over time and can't be rushed. Individual sisters can't be the judge of whether I am an American or not. (b) Also, because my immigration process took a lot of time and money, the community decided not to be open to non-Americans in the future. This was hard for me, especially as I spoke with women from [European country] and other countries who expressed interest in our community but I had to tell them that discerning with us was not possible. [2nd generation white woman religious whose parents emigrated from a European country who lives in a community with at least one other person from her ethnic background.]

Being clumped together with all the other members just because I am an American even though being black in America is way different than just being an American and comes with its own challenges, but because I'm an American that makes me a part of the "them" and "they" group. [3rd generation black male religious who lives in a community where he is the sole person from his ethnic group.]

Summary of Findings

In this study, white respondents (68%) make up two-thirds of those who have entered religious life since 2005, with the other third reporting ethnic backgrounds of Asian (12%), Hispanic (11%), black (4%), and all “other” ethnicities (5%). Their ethnicity correlates highly with their country of birth (and, therefore, with where they grew up):

- 82% of those identifying as black were born outside the United States
- 76% of those identifying as Asian were born outside the United States
- 38% of those identifying as Hispanic were born outside the United States
- 8% of those identifying as white were born outside the United States

Family Factors Affecting Vocational Discernment

More than seven in ten (72%) religious priests, brothers and sisters report that family-related factors had “some” or “a great” impact on their discernment of a vocation to religious life. Analyses show that family ethnic background and how many generations ago they and/or their family emigrated to the United States is related to how much of an impact family-related factors had on their decision. The five factors from their family life that had “a great” impact – regardless of when their family emigrated to the United States – are:

- Getting to know a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun besides family members (62% of all respondents say it had “a great” impact)
- Attending Masses or other religious services as a family (60%)
- My parents instilling in me a prayer life (51%)
- Actively participating in parish life as a family (46%)
- Sense of religiosity in my family (45%)

Parish Factors Affecting Vocational Discernment

Over eight in ten (83%) religious indicate that a particular parish they attended before entering their religious institute had “some” or “a great” impact on their discernment of a vocation to religious life. Some 86% of the parishes were in the U.S. and 14% were in another country. Black and Asian respondents are most likely to have identified a parish in another country that they attended as adults, with white and Hispanics most likely to have identified one in the U.S. that they attended as children.

Those identifying a significant parish outside of the U.S. were most likely to say the following had “a great impact” on them at their parish:

- Masses and liturgies at the parish (67%)
- Participating in the liturgical ministry at the parish (64%)
- Masses and liturgies in the language of my ethnic/cultural heritage at the parish (60%)
- Clergy at my parish supporting and encouraging me to discern my religious vocation (54%)
- Witnessing the presence of religious sisters, or brothers, or priests in the parish (54%)
- Celebrating ethnic Catholic traditions at the parish (50%)
- Conversations with priests or religious brothers or sisters in the parish (49%)



The top factors having “a great impact” on those who attended a U.S. parish – among whom factors are generally less likely to have an impact than among those attending a foreign parish – are:

- Masses and liturgies at the parish (61%)
- Clergy at my parish supporting and encouraging me to discern my religious vocation (50%)
- Adult faith formation in this parish (47%)
- Participating in the liturgical ministry at the parish (46%)
- Witnessing the presence of religious sisters, or brothers, or priests in the parish (44%)
- Conversations with priests or religious brothers or sisters in the parish (44%)

Openness of their Religious Institute to Cultural Diversity

Most responding religious members say their religious institute is already succeeding at being open to those of different cultural backgrounds. The strongest exceptions are the members who are the sole member with their ethnic background in the communities in which they live. About half of these respondents say the following are areas where their religious institute is only “a little” or “not at all” open:

- Providing a mentor from the same culture, if possible, for those in initial formation (53%)
- Using a prayer practice from another culture (50%)
- Providing an acculturation program for new members from outside the U.S. (49%)
- Having bi-lingual or multilingual prayers (47%)

Cultural Challenges Members Face in their Religious Institutes

The ethnic makeup of the communities in which members live are also related to how much of a cultural challenge members personally have found living within their institute. Those who are the sole member with their ethnic background are especially likely to report feeling “somewhat” or “very” challenged in these ways:

- Members who I live with not understanding my culture (49%)
- Not feeling understood by other members of my institute (32%)
- Feeling isolated or lonely (28%)
- Members who I live with not accepting my culture (28%)
- Feeling that I am asked too much to accommodate my culture to fit in the dominant ethnic/racial cohort of my institute (23%)
- My food not being welcomed in my community (23%)
- During my initial formation, my formator requiring me to accommodate my culture to that of my institute (20%)

In sum, the more recent cohort of women and men religious in the United States is more culturally and ethnically diverse than their older cohorts. While this diversity enriches religious life, it also challenges the leadership and the membership of religious communities to better welcome and adjust to the cultural changes in many aspects of their religious life together.

This report was prepared by Sr. Thu Do, LHC, Jonathon Wiggins, and Fr. Thomas Gaunt, SJ, of CARA. A more detailed version of the report is available at CARA by request.

For more information about the two reports:

2019 study of Recent Vocations to Religious Life for the National Religious Vocation Conference (2020):

<https://nrvc.net/509/publication/9180-2020-study-on-recent-vocations-to-religious-life>

2020 study of Cultural Diversity in Vocations to Religious Life in the United States for the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation (2021):

<https://cara.georgetown.edu/DiversityVocations.pdf>



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