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FROM: Sr. Mary Ann Walsh

O: 202-541-3200

M: 301-325-7935

mwalsh@usccb.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STUDY: NEW MEMBERS IN RELIGIOUS ORDERS YOUNGER, MORE EDUCATED

**Religious brothers added to class survey
Men, women considering vocation at younger age
Many attended Catholic schools**

WASHINGTON—Women and men entering religious orders today are younger and more educated than new members of the recent past. They also have participated in numerous church activities, including parish youth ministry and campus ministry, according to a national survey.

The findings were made public in *New Sisters and Brothers in Perpetual Vows*, a study of men and women religious who professed perpetual vows in 2011. The study was conducted by the Georgetown University-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA).

Profession of perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience marks a final step of incorporation of new members into religious communities.

The CARA survey was commissioned by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. The survey was sent to sisters and brothers identified by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR), the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), and over 150 contemplative communities. A total of 84 out of the 122 religious who were contacted responded, representing 52 women's and eight men's religious congregations,

provinces, or monasteries. The report was slated for formal release February 2, the Church's celebration of the World Day for Consecrated Life.

Major findings note:

- The average age among women professing perpetual vows in 2011 was 39, which is four years younger than last year's survey respondents; among men it was 42. Half of the responding women religious are 39 or younger; among responding brothers, half are 44 or younger.
- Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of those surveyed identify themselves as white while nearly one in five (19 percent) identify as Asian, and almost one in ten (nine percent) identify as Hispanic. Seventy percent were born in the United States. Of those born outside the United States, the most common countries of origin are Vietnam, the Philippines and India.
- More than nine in ten (94 percent) respondents have been Catholic since birth. About eight in ten (79 percent) come from families in which both parents are Catholic.
- Nearly half of responding religious (48 percent, about equal for women and men) attended a Catholic elementary school. Respondents are also more likely than other U.S. Catholics to have attended a Catholic high school (36 percent of responding religious, compared to 22 percent of U.S. adult Catholics) and much more likely to have attended a Catholic college (25 percent of women religious, compared to just 7 percent of U.S. adult Catholics).
 - The responding religious are highly educated. Sixteen percent of responding religious earned a graduate degree before entering their religious institute (including 26 percent among brothers). Nearly six in ten (57 percent) entered their religious institute with at least a bachelor's degree or more (56 percent for women and 76 percent for men).
- Many respondents were active in parish life before entering their religious institute. One-third participated in a young adult group and one in five participated in a youth ministry or other youth group. About one in four (24 percent) was active in campus ministry or a Newman Club on campus.
- Nearly all (95 percent) responding religious regularly participated in some type of private prayer activity before they entered their religious institute. Two-thirds joined in retreats (more common among women than men) or regularly prayed the Rosary and three in five participated in Eucharistic Adoration before entering. About half regularly participated in a faith sharing or Bible study group and/or in regular spiritual direction.

- On average, responding religious report that they were 19 years old when they first considered a vocation to religious life, but half were 17 or younger when they first did so. This reflects an earlier consideration than last year's class.
- A great majority of the religious of those professed in 2011 (86 percent) participated in some type of vocation program or experience prior to entering their religious institute. Most commonly, this was a "Come and See" experience (61 percent) or a vocation retreat (39 percent).

"Religious sisters, priests and brothers are treasured by the Church, and we support their sacred commitment to be poor, chaste and obedient in imitation of Christ and at his service. By virtue of their life they help us set our heart's goal not on this life, but on eternal life," said Archbishop Robert J. Carlson of St. Louis, chairman of the Committee for Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. "In a world where human frailty is acutely felt, they remind us of God and bring Christ's redemptive love to all they meet. The bishops of the United States are delighted to support their vocations in religious life."

"We are encouraged by the report's findings that men and women are considering a vocation at a younger age. As Catholics recognize their responsibility to build a vocation culture in its parishes, schools and families, children and youth are being introduced to the various vocations in the Church," said Mercy Sister Mary Joanna Ruhland, associate director of the Secretariat. "This helps them respond to God's love and will generously and willingly. We congratulate these sisters and brothers and pray that the vitality and joy of their vocation be experienced by all whom they meet."

The entire survey can be found at <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/consecrated-life/profession-class/>.

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