



## Mythbusters

Ten myths about religious life . . .  
and the facts from the 2009 NRVC/CARA Study that dispel them

### **Myth #1: No one is entering religious life anymore.**

**Fact:** More than 70 percent of all religious communities (both men's and women's) report having new members in formation. Nearly 20 percent have five or more people in some stage of formation. These numbers do not reflect the large number of entrants in the 1950s and '60s, although many people have used this period as a point for comparison. The 2009 NRVC/CARA Study on Recent Vocations sets the benchmark for the current century.

### **Myth #2: Most vocations are coming from older/second-career candidates.**

**Fact:** Our study indicates that the average age of men who entered religious life since 1993 was 30. For women the age was 32. The data also shows that 71 percent of those in initial formation are under 40. Although there always has been, and always will be a place for older or second career candidates in religious life, our study results have confirmed what we have tracked in our Vocation Match Annual Trends Survey, which is that an increasing number of younger people are looking at religious life as a possible life option.

### **Myth #3: Conservative/traditional communities are the only communities attracting new members.**

**Fact:** Religious institutes that have a focused mission, who live in community, who have regular prayer and sacramental life, and who wear a habit show a higher proportion of newer members. The study indicates that men and women are also drawn to other types of religious life.

### **Myth #4: Women entering religious life want to wear habits.**

**Fact:** Both men and women seem to be drawn to habited communities. About two thirds of the newer members say they belong to a religious institute that wears a habit. Among those that responded affirmatively, a little more than half indicate that the habit is required in all or most circumstances.

Interestingly, almost half of the men who belong to an institute that does not wear a habit say they would wear it if it were an option, compared to nearly a quarter of the women respondents.

### **Myth #5: Entering religious life is a last resort.**

**Fact:** New members to religious life report having rich options available to them—in terms of career, education,

and personal life choices. Seventy percent of respondents had at least a bachelor's degree before entering, with one third of these respondents also having degrees in higher education. Nine out of ten respondents said that they were employed prior to entering their institutes.

### **Myth #6: Younger religious are not interested in traditional devotional practices.**

**Fact:** Newer members have ranked highly daily Mass as very important to them. Their prayer style also expresses a strong preference for Liturgy of the Hours, faith-sharing, nonliturgical common prayer, Eucharistic adoration, and common rosary and meditation.

### **Myth #7: There are fewer religious communities.**

**Fact:** The rise and diminishment of religious institutes has always been part of the continuum of religious life. Once a need is met, unless a community adapts its founding charism to addressing the changing needs in the Church, it is not uncommon for the community to end. Many congregations today that share a same charism are either consolidating or merging into new religious institutes. One little known fact is that since the end of Vatican II in 1965, approximately 175 newer religious communities have been founded in the United States alone. Some were only short-lived, but others are canonically recognized as religious institutes by the Church today.

### **Myth #8: Religious communities are homogeneous and lacking in ethnic and cultural diversity.**

**Fact:** This may have been the case previously, but newer members are definitely changing the face of religious life in this country. Fifty eight percent of newer religious are white Anglo, compared to 94 percent of the finally professed men and women religious in the US. Nearly 20 percent of newer entrants were born in a country other than the United States. Hispanic/Latino vocations make up 21 per cent of the newer religious while 14 per cent are Asian/Pacific and 6 per cent are African or African American.

### **Myth #9: New members would prefer to live alone.**

**Fact:** Newer members are coming to religious life not just for ministry, but also for common prayer and community living as well. Respondents were much more likely to indicate a preference for living in a large (8 or more) or medium-sized (4 to 7) community than living in a small community and especially living alone. This is especially true of younger members.

### **Myth #10: New members want to live with younger members.**

**Fact:** Although having a peer group of their age cohort is extremely important to younger members, the evidence shows an extremely high percentage (93) of newer members who prefer to live in community with people of different ages. In addition, newer members also show a preference for living with people of different cultures and who do different ministries.

### **Bonus:**

**Myth #11: New members are drawn to the ministries of a community.**

**Fact:** Newer members indicate that they are drawn to religious life because of the example of the members, the spirituality, prayer life, community life, and mission of the institute. In fact, more than half of the newer members surveyed indicate that they were previously involved in either some liturgical ministry or other volunteer work in a parish or other setting. Since newer members were already previously involved in some type of ministry, clearly, they are coming to religious life not just for ministry—they are coming for a way of life that is different from what they were living before.