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VISION VOCATIONMATCH.COM

Results of Annual Survey on Trends in Catholic Religious Vocations **Continued jump in interest in religious vocations attributed** **to desire for deeper spirituality and easier access to** **information via the internet**

Chicago, March 17, 2009—Nearly 70 percent of Catholic religious communities have seen a jump in vocation inquiries in the past year, according to a survey conducted by VocationMatch.com, the leading online religious vocation discernment website. Sixty-nine percent of the communities responding to the website's annual "Survey on Trends in Religious Vocations" reported increased inquiries into religious life.

Discerners—those interested in religious life—are primarily under 40 years old and say they are looking at religious life because of a desire for deeper spirituality. Most are quite serious about exploring religious life, and nearly 20 percent plan to enter religious formation in the next 12 months.

"This information is vital to the life of the Catholic Church and the future of religious life," commented Holy Cross Brother Paul Bednarczyk, C.S.C., executive director the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) in Chicago.

The NRVC and its publishing partner TrueQuest Communications annually survey discerners who have completed profiles on VocationMatch.com, as well as vocation directors of religious communities featured in VISION Vocation Guide, an NRVC print and online publication.

An impressive 90 percent of discerners say their inquiries into religious life are made easier because of access to information about religious life on the Internet. "With the dawn of instant and anonymous information-gathering via the Internet, we've begun to see a steady increase in inquiries about religious life, which we expect will translate into more vocations over the next decade," said Patrice Tuohy, executive editor of VISION Vocation Guide and VocationMatch.com.

All in good faith

In addition to their desire for a deeper spirituality and a life of faithfulness to the church, discerners say they are most drawn to a particular religious community by its prayer life and community living. A significant 35 percent ranked justice and peace outreach as essential.

Men flip for habits

An interesting turn in trends: A higher percentage of men compared to women (68 to 61) ranked wearing a religious habit as important or essential to what attracts them to a religious community. This preference has flipped from a year ago when women outranked men in their interest in wearing religious garb.

Let's get personal

Not surprisingly, those discerning a call to religious life still consider personal contact with someone in religious life as the most essential resource for gathering information about vocations (53 percent). However, "Come and See" weekends ranked high on every age group's list (42 percent) as did working with a counselor or spiritual director (38 percent). A religious community's website ranked next, above vocation directors, parish priests, parents, and friends, and 58 percent rated vocation-related websites as either very important or essential to their information-gathering.

Vocation Update

Religious life is ageless

In a piece of very good news for religious communities with aging memberships, “living with someone not my age” is ranked as the least challenging aspect of religious life. Celibacy, a life of service, and living simply are all perceived as more challenging to this year’s crop of discerners than last year’s. Prayer and spiritual direction continue to rank as the most essential element in making a decision about religious life, and the discipline of prayer remains the greatest perceived challenge in living as a religious priest, sister, or brother.

Brothers gain ground

Religious brothers must be getting the word out because interest in their way of life has jumped 9 percentage points in the past two years. The apostolic/evangelical way of life—living and working outside of a monastery or cloister—remains discerners’ preferred religious lifestyle, with the exception of 50- to 59-year-olds, who feel most drawn to a semi-cloistered/active way of life.

Surprise! Religious life is alive and well

“That it still exists!” was the enthusiastic response of one young woman when asked what surprised her most about religious life. Other things that surprised both men and women were the number of different religious orders, the variety of ministries, and age restrictions. One man felt overwhelmed by the “amount of joy I have at the idea of joining”; another “that it is everyday ordinary people who are called to religious life.” One woman was surprised by the peace her choice for religious life affords her; another by the “freedom it brings.”

Hopes and fears

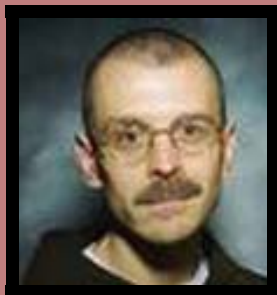
As for fears, many women expressed a fear of not seeing friends and family enough if they entered religious life; men expressed a fear of the loss of personal freedom and being unfaithful to their vows. One man captured the sentiments of many: “My greatest fear is not of religious life itself, but of the process of getting there--the reordering of my life to make the religious life possible.”

Half of all discerners going through VocationMatch.com are under 30--good news for communities looking for an infusion of youth. A sizeable 16 percent of discerners are over 50, a fact which invites religious communities to find new ways to associate with discerners of all ages.

Don’t hide your light under a basket!

“What these 2009 VocationMatch.com survey results show is that communities with effective online representation and promotion strategies stand the best chance to benefit from the significant interest in vocations that is clearly out there,” said VISION Executive Editor Patrice Tuohy.

(VISION VOCATION GUIDE, in print and online at Vocation-Network.org is published by TrueQuest Communications, LLC, of Chicago, TrueQuest.biz, on behalf of the National Religious Vocation Conference, NRVC.net.)



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