

**Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.**



**Women Religious Institutes: Online Presence Survey (*Phase I*)
A Report for A Nun's Life Ministry
December 2016**

Executive Summary

This report is based on a survey administered between January 26, 2016, and June 1, 2016. It includes Catholic religious congregations, provinces, regions, delegations, monasteries, and other entities (jointly referred to as “units” in this report) present in the United States. The focus of the report is on the online activity in general and on the online vocation ministry in particular.

The survey sample was provided to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) by A Nun's Life Ministry. The survey sample includes 561 units. Out of this number, CARA received 257 valid responses resulting in a response rate of 46 percent.¹

Overall, 42 percent of responding units are congregations, 27 percent are provinces, 19 percent are monasteries, 7 percent are regions, 2 percent are delegations, and 4 percent have some other status.

Major Findings

Background Characteristics

- In terms of canonical status, 71 percent of all responding units are institutes of pontifical right, 13 percent are monasteries, and 11 percent are religious institutes of diocesan right. The remaining 5 percent have other canonical status.

¹ It is not possible to precisely estimate how many potential respondents may not have received the invitation by mail or email due to an invalid address. An additional 27 respondents logged into the survey online but did not complete the questionnaire. Previous CARA surveys of institutes have had response rates closer to 60 percent. However, in this case, the content of the study may not apply to many smaller units/institutes, those no longer actively seeking vocations, and some cloistered communities. Some of these potential respondents contacted CARA and indicated they did not or could not respond because they did not feel the survey applied to them.

- The number of sisters varies from 1 to 764 in a unit. On average, there is 1 postulant/candidate per unit, 1 novice per unit, 2 sisters who professed temporary vows per unit, and 107 sisters who professed perpetual/solemn vows per unit.
- On average, there are 4 African, African American, or non-Hispanic black sisters per unit, 100 Anglo, Caucasian, or non-Hispanic white sisters per unit, 9 Asian or Pacific Islander sisters per unit, 7 Hispanic/Latina sisters per unit, 5 Native American/American Indian sisters per unit, and 4 sisters of other races/ethnicities per unit.
- The most populous age groups consist of sisters who are 70 to 89 years old. On average, there are 40 sisters ages 70 to 79 per unit and 38 sisters ages 80 to 89 per unit.
- On average, there are 13 religious houses per unit.

Unit's Online Presence

- The most common form of a unit's online presence is on websites (92 percent of all responding units) followed by Facebook (70 percent), YouTube (48 percent), e-newsletters (47 percent), blogs (35 percent), and Twitter (33 percent) among others.
- Out of all responding units, 43 percent reported that the unit's online presence is closely connected with that of the institute and 19 percent reported that the unit's online presence is totally separate from the institute's online presence.
- Almost a quarter of the units (23 percent) have a written policy for use of social media by staff/employees of the unit and 40 percent have a written policy for use of social media by sisters (who are not staff/employees) who have personal social media accounts.
- When asked how many sisters in the unit regularly post or comment in the unit's social networks the most frequent response is only a few (41 percent of the units responding), followed by several sister (28 percent), no sisters (11 percent), and a lot of sisters (9 percent).
- Almost half of the units (49 percent) indicated that they use web analytics.
- Online presence of the unit is on average devoted between "quite a bit" and "very much" to describing the ministry, prayer, and community life of the unit.

Online Vocation Ministry

- On average, websites and Facebook are used "quite a bit" to promote vocations. On average, responding units used the following "a little" to promote vocations: Instagram, blogs, Twitter, YouTube, and e-newsletters. On average, responding units do "not use at all" any of the following to promote vocations: Snapchat, podcasts, Tumblr, chat rooms,

other social media, forums or discussion boards, live streaming events, LinkedIn, and Pinterest.

- The majority of survey participants (75 percent of all respondents) indicated that sisters in the unit provide the vocation content for online use.
- In one third of the units (34 percent of the units that reported on the issue), the vocation content is updated online less than once a month, in 20 percent the vocation content is updated online at least once a month, and in 15 percent the vocation content is updated online at least once a week.
- The vast majority (76 percent) of units that responded do not have a written plan that identifies the desired outcomes and strategies for vocation promotion on the internet.
- Out of all respondents, 41 percent reported that vocation promoters in their unit seek training in using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc.
- On average, respondents agreed “very much” that being involved in social media is a way to understand young people today.
- The respondents would like to see improvements in the following areas of their online vocation outreach: having more skills and time to establish and maintain online presence, being more present online, using specific vehicles of online presence (such as videos and blogs), and being more focused and deliberate.
- The responding units identified a number of challenges in regard to online vocation ministry including: being appealing and/or effective in reaching out to the target audience, keeping the unit’s online content current, continuously adapting to changes, etc.
- The responding units identified a number of benefits to online vocation ministry including the observations that the online environment provides a good way for the discerners to learn about a religious community without committing to the process, that online presence helps bring discerners (and in some cases more vocations to the unit), that online presence facilitates developing relationships with discerners, that vocation ministry online is relatively quick and efficient, etc.