



# NRVC

National Religious  
Vocation Conference

*An NRVC/CARA Study*

For the complete NRVC/CARA Cultural Diversity Study and related resources, go to [www.NRVC.net](http://www.NRVC.net)

## HOW COMMUNITIES REACH OUT

To reach culturally diverse populations communities report:

- Reaching out where diverse candidates and/or immigrant communities live, work, and worship
- Intentionally inviting culturally diverse candidates to activities of the community that might interest them
- Celebrating bilingual liturgies as a community
- Appointing a vocation director of a diverse background
- Advertising in non-English media
- Creating vocation materials in other languages, with culturally diverse people in images

## HOW COMMUNITIES INTEGRATE

Asked how they have accommodated culturally diverse members, leaders reported:

- Incorporating food, prayers, and devotions of diverse members into the community at large
- Intentionally making some community households bilingual and/or bicultural
- Matching diverse new members with a mentor of the same background
- Providing tutoring or language help as needed

When asked what they have done well in this regard, leaders reported:

- Having bilingual formation staff
- Having multicultural formation communities
- Establishing houses of formation in other countries.
- Educating the community about other cultures to increase awareness

### Incorporating Cultural Diversity in Religious Life: A Report for the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) Published by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, August 2014

#### SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

THIS REPORT ON INCORPORATING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN RELIGIOUS LIFE presents findings from a study of U.S.-based religious institutes about the ways they recruit and integrate multicultural candidates into their communities. The National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University to learn from religious institutes about their policies, procedures, and experiences with the formation and integration of candidates from cultures different from the dominant one of the institute. The goal of the research is to provide information that will help promote religious life and strengthen its quality so that it will better attract and retain new members.

#### Racial and ethnic composition of religious institutes

- Nine in 10 religious institutes report that the dominant racial/ethnic culture of the institute is white. On average, nine in 10 full members of religious institutes are Caucasian/White/Anglo, 6 percent are Hispanic/Latino(a), 3 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent are African American/Black/African. Institutes of men are slightly more racially/ethnically diverse than are institutes of women.
- Those who have entered religious institutes in the past 10 years are more diverse, reflecting the increasing diversity in the U.S. Catholic population as a whole. Among those entering in the past 10 years, 57 percent are Caucasian/White/Anglo, 17 percent are Hispanic/Latino(a), 16 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, 8 percent are African American/Black/African, and 2 percent are Native American or other race/ethnicity.
- More than six in 10 institutes report having at least one entrant in the past 10 years born outside the United States. Institutes of men are particularly likely to have had someone from outside the U.S. enter in the past 10 years.
- Eight in 10 institutes of men and about two-thirds of institutes of women have at least one person in initial formation. Among those in initial formation, three in five are Caucasian/White/Anglo, about one in six is Asian/Pacific Islander, just over one in 10 is Hispanic/Latino (a), one in 20 is African American/Black/African, and about 4 percent are Native American or some other race/ethnicity.
- Almost six in 10 institutes have at least one person currently in initial formation born outside the United States. Institutes of men are somewhat more likely than institutes of women to report having someone from outside the United States in initial formation.

#### Recruitment of culturally diverse candidates

- About two-thirds of responding superiors indicate that their vocation directors/vocation committees, institute leaders, and formation personnel are “very” open to recruiting candidates from cultures different from the dominant ethnic/racial cohort of their institutes. Fewer than half report that their members, in general, are “very” open to such recruitment.
- Seven in 10 report that their institute’s website displays a diversity of cultures. About six in 10 indicate that the majority of their printed promotional materials display a diversity of cultures. International institutes and missionary institutes are more likely to display a variety of cultures in their online and printed materials.
- Candidates born outside the United States are accepted by more than nine in 10 institutes. Just over half, however, have policies and procedures in place for accepting such candidates. Institutes of men are more likely than institutes of women to have such policies and procedures. International institutes are more likely than those

## CHALLENGES RELATED TO CULTURAL DIVERSITY

- The Catholic Church in the United States is much more diverse than is the population of most religious orders (which are 89 percent Caucasian).
- Overall, leaders report that they and the community vocation directors are more open to culturally diverse candidates than are the members (page 40).
- Two frequently mentioned challenges regarding new entrants are maintaining formation staffs and the age gap between entrants and members (page 41).
- Immigration difficulties are a frequent challenge for entrants without citizenship status

## HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

- Newer entrants are more culturally diverse than in the past. Caucasians have fallen to 57 percent among new entrants (page 15).
- International institutes and missionary institutes are more likely than other types of religious communities to have multicultural approaches to prayer and celebrations.

## WHO WAS SURVEYED AND WHY

The intent of this study was to learn from leaders of religious communities about the policies and procedures communities use, and the experiences they have had with the formation and integration of culturally diverse candidates.

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate mailed surveys to the superiors of **835 religious institutes** in the U.S. A total of **350 completed the survey**, a **42 percent response rate**. The units that responded represent 31,807 perpetually professed, **roughly half** of all men and women religious in the country.

that are entirely U.S. based to have policies and procedures regarding accepting candidates with limited English skills and to provide an acculturation program for new members from outside the United States.

- In response to an open-ended question about how they reach out to potential candidates from other cultures, institute leaders frequently mention these practices: appointing vocation directors of diverse backgrounds, reaching out to diverse candidates in the minority and/or immigrant communities where the members live and work, and being welcoming to diverse candidates when they host open houses or participate in ethnic celebrations.

### Integrating culturally diverse members into initial formation programs

- More than three-quarters of institutes report that their vocation directors/vocation committees, formation personnel, and institute leaders are “very” open to welcoming those in initial formation who are from cultures different from the dominant ethnic/racial cohort of their institutes. Just over half of the members in general are said to be as open to welcoming such candidates.
- When asked to describe what their institute has done well to accommodate new members of different cultures, institutes are especially likely to mention establishing houses of formation in other countries or cultures, having bilingual formation staff, and having multicultural formation communities.
- When asked how often their institutes engage in practices to welcome those in initial formation from diverse cultures, more than half of institutes report at least “occasionally” openly discussing cultural differences, sharing a community meal with food from another culture, celebrating the feast day of the patron saint of another country, educating community members about another culture, and celebrating holidays of different cultures.
- Units that are part of an international institute or society are more likely than those that are U.S. based to use multiple languages in prayer, to celebrate the holidays of different cultures, and to provide a mentor from the same culture for those in initial formation. Similarly, units that are part of a missionary institute or society are more likely than those that are not to use multiple languages in prayer, celebrate with ethnic dance or song, educate members about another culture, and celebrate holidays of different cultures.
- One of the most frequently mentioned challenges for integrating new members into institutes concerns the difficulties some of them have in maintaining formation staffs when they have infrequent entrants into their communities. Furthermore, some indicate that having so few peers can make those participating in initial formation feel isolated.

### Integrating culturally diverse members into community life

- In response to an open-ended question about challenges to integrating new members into institutes, institutes are most likely to mention the age gap between the established and newer members, language and communication challenges, difficulties with the Immigration and Naturalization Services’ regulations, and a lack of understanding of each other’s cultural background.
- More than half of responding superiors report that their vocation directors/vocation committees, formation personnel, and institute leaders are “very” open to accommodating the customs and practices of new members from cultures different from the dominant ethnic/racial cohort of their institutes. About three in 10 agree that their members in general are “very” open to such accommodation.
- To develop or encourage cultural awareness in their institutes, about half to two-thirds of respondents have engaged in the following practices in the past year: used music from another culture in prayer, encouraged members to learn another language, displayed art from another culture, contacted someone from another culture about a vocation to religious life, sponsored or attended a mission trip to another culture, or shared cultural traditions in holiday celebrations. Missionary institutes are more likely than those that are not missionary to engage in practices that encourage cultural awareness and integrate diversity into their unit.
- To integrate diversity into their institutes in the past year, over half of superiors report encouraging minority members to share their culture in community life, and four in 10 have accommodated family visits for minority members. More than two in 10 report increasing the visibility or mentoring minority members for institute leadership. International institutes are as likely as domestic institutes to engage in practices to encourage cultural awareness and integrate diversity.
- When asked what their unit has done well to accommodate new members of different cultures, responding superiors mentioned practices such as providing language tutoring or English as a Second Language courses to new members, encouraging new members to have contact with others of their culture outside the institute, and giving new members positions of responsibility and/or leadership within the institute.

—Excerpted from the Executive Summary of The Study on Cultural Diversity, pp. 1-10