**Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate**

**Georgetown University**

**Washington, DC**

*The Class of 2014: Survey of Ordinands to the Priesthood*

**Executive Summary**

This report presents findings from a national survey of ordinands to the priesthood in

2014. To obtain the names and contact information for these ordinands, the Center for Applied

Research in the Apostolate (CARA) contacted all theologates and houses of formation in fall

2013 to request names and contact information for every seminarian who was scheduled to be

ordained to the priesthood in 2014. CARA also notified the vocation director at all dioceses and

archdioceses in the United States about the project and asked for their support in encouraging

their potential ordinands to complete the survey.

CARA then contacted the ordinands by e-mail to explain the project and ask them to

complete a brief online survey. At the same time, CARA also e-mailed or faxed a similar

request to the seminary rector or president at all theologates in its Catholic ministry formation

database as well as all major superiors of clerical and mixed religious institutes, asking them to

contact their ordinands for CARA and invite them to participate in the online survey.

After repeated follow-up, a total of 365 ordinands responded to the survey by March 31,

2014 (five others were being ordained for a diocese outside of the United States and were

removed from the sample). This represents a response rate of approximately 77 percent of the

477 potential ordinands reported to CARA by theologates, houses of formation, arch/dioceses,

and religious institutes. These 365 ordinands include 266 ordinands to the diocesan priesthood,

from 112 different dioceses and archdioceses, and 96 ordinands to the religious priesthood.

Three ordinands did not supply information about where they were to be ordained.

**Major Findings**

The average age of ordinands for the Class of 2014 is 34. The median age (midpoint of

the distribution) is 32. Eight in ten responding ordinands are between 25 and 39. This

distribution is slightly younger than in 2013, but follows the pattern in recent years of

average age at ordination in the mid-thirties.

On average, diocesan ordinands lived in the diocese or eparchy for which they will be

ordained for 15 years before entering the seminary. Religious ordinands knew the

members of their religious institute an average of seven years before they entered the

seminary.

**Background and Country of Origin**

Two thirds of responding ordinands (67 percent) report their primary race or ethnicity as

Caucasian/European American/white. Compared to the adult Catholic population of the

United States, ordinands are more likely to be of Asian or Pacific Islander background

(11 percent of responding ordinands), but less likely to be Hispanic/Latino (15 percent of

responding ordinands). Compared to diocesan ordinands, religious ordinands are less

likely to report their race or ethnicity as Caucasian/European American/white.

Three in ten ordinands (31 percent) were born outside the United States, with the largest

numbers coming from Mexico, Vietnam, Colombia, Poland, and the Philippines. On

average, responding ordinands who were born in another country have lived in the United

States for 13 years. Between 20 and 30 percent of ordinands to diocesan priesthood for

each of the last ten years were born outside of the United States, as were 26 percent of

this year’s diocesan ordinands.

Most ordinands have been Catholic since birth, although 9 percent became Catholic later

in life. Eighty-one percent report that both of their parents are Catholic and more than a

third (36 percent) have a relative who is a priest or a religious.

Almost all ordinands in the Class of 2014 (97 percent) have at least one sibling. Seven in

ten (71 percent) have more than two siblings, while one in five (20 percent) have five or

more siblings. Ordinands are most likely to be the oldest in their family (37 percent).

**Education, Ministry, and Work Experience**

Before entering the seminary, more than half of ordinands completed college (54

percent). One in six (16 percent) entered seminary with a graduate degree. Among those

who completed college before entering the seminary, seven in ten (72 percent) entered the

seminary at the pre-theology level and 18 percent entered at the theology level. Four in

ten (42 percent) report entering the seminary while in college.

The most common fields of study for ordinands before entering the seminary are social

sciences (19 percent), liberal arts (16 percent), and theology or philosophy (14 percent).

Half of responding ordinands (50 percent) attended a Catholic elementary school, which

is a rate higher than that of all Catholic adults in the United States. In addition, ordinands

are somewhat more likely than other U.S. Catholic adults to have attended a Catholic

high school and they are much more likely to have attended a Catholic college (45

percent, compared to 7 percent among U.S. Catholic adults).

Just over a quarter (26 percent) carried educational debt at the time they entered the

seminary, averaging a little over $21,000 in educational debt at entrance to seminary.

Six in ten ordinands (60 percent) report some type of full-time work experience prior to

entering the seminary, most often in education. Four percent of responding ordinands

report prior service in the U.S. Armed Forces. About one in six ordinands (15 percent)

report that either parent had a military career in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Ordinands of the Class of 2014 have been active in parish ministries, with eight in ten (80

percent) indicating they served as an altar server and about half (52 percent) report being

a lector. One-sixth (16 percent) participated in a World Youth Day before entering the

seminary.

About seven in ten ordinands report regularly praying the rosary (68 percent) and

participating in Eucharistic adoration (70 percent) before entering the seminary.

**Vocational Discernment**

On average, responding ordinands report that they were about 17 when they first

considered a vocation to the priesthood. They were encouraged to consider a vocation by

an average of four people. Seven in ten (71 percent) say they were encouraged by a

parish priest. Other frequent encouragers include friends (45 percent), parishioners (43

percent), and mothers (38 percent).

Almost half of responding ordinands (48 percent) indicated that they were discouraged

from considering the priesthood by one or more persons. Among those who reported

discouragement, on average, one individual is said to have discouraged them. 17 percent

indicate that one person discouraged them from considering the priesthood and the same

amount indicate that two people discouraged them.