

Frequently Asked Questions



What is a vocation?

Many people use the word *vocation* (from the Latin *vocare*, meaning “to call”) in reference to the call to be a priest, sister, or brother. However, the Catholic understanding of vocation is much broader: every baptized person has a vocation—a call—to love and serve God. How you choose to live out that vocation is what each person must discern. Some feel called to live as single or married laypeople; others choose consecrated life and join a secular institute or religious community (as sisters, priests, or brothers); still others choose ordination as deacons or diocesan priests.

What is a sister or nun?

A sister or nun is a woman who belongs to a religious order, or community. Many people use the word nun interchangeably with sister, but technically nuns are those who live a cloistered (or enclosed) monastic life, whereas sisters serve in an active ministry. After a period of preparation (called formation) sisters and nuns take lifelong vows. Usually they take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience; that is, they promise to live simply, to live celibately, and to follow the will of God through their community.

Why was there such a surge in religious vocations in the last century?

If you consider the continuum of religious life, the extraordinary number of men and women who entered religious life during the last century was an anomaly. Historically, religious sisters, brothers, and priests have always been a small number of the Catholic population. Some contributing factors to this surge in larger numbers were the limited opportunities for church ministry prior to Vatican II, a large influx of Catholic immigrants entering the U.S., the Catholic Church was growing in prominence and respect, and the similarity in values of the Catholic Church with U.S. societal values.

Are young people still choosing to become sisters?

Yes, and there's an uptick in newer entrants. For the second year in a row, over 500 women and men have entered religious life in the United States. Following an unusual surge in the mid-20th century, the number of men and women religious today more closely reflects a number consistent with the beginning of the last century. According to the 2009 NRVC/CARA study, 71 percent of those who have entered religious life and are currently in initial formation are under 40.

What is a vocation director?

A vocation director is designated by a religious institute to promote vowed membership, to help others discern their vocation, and to oversee the application process of new members entering the community as a postulant. They assist those who are considering the possibility of religious life by providing support, discernment counseling, and information. The vocation director for a religious congregation answers to the elected superiors of their congregation. The National Religious Vocation

Conference is the professional organization for vocation directors of religious communities.

What is the process to enter religious life?

Typically someone interested in religious life goes through a discernment process where they prayerfully consider the call to religious life, explore vocation options, contact religious communities, and eventually begin a more formal process of discernment with a particular religious institute.

Once a candidate chooses to apply to a community and is accepted, he or she typically begins a formation process starting with postulancy or candidacy, in which the person is introduced to the communal life, ministries, and mission of the community. Following postulancy comes the novitiate, where a person is formally admitted to a religious institute. The novitiate is an extended time of prayer, study, and spirituality, which usually lasts for at least one year. After the novitiate, the novice is admitted to temporary vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. This period of temporary commitment allows for further discernment before he or she makes perpetual profession of vows within a given religious institute.

How many religious institutes are there in the U.S., and how many priests, sisters, brothers?

There are 768 religious institutes in the United States.

Diocesan priests: 25,757

Religious priests: 11,424

Permanent deacons: 18,287

Religious brothers: 4,007

Religious sisters: 45,605

These and additional statistics are found on the [CARA](#) website.

How do religious communities screen candidates?

Religious institutes usually require an extensive process of screening candidates to religious life, which usually includes extensive interviews, background checks, and medical and psychological testing. Candidates must demonstrate a lived commitment to the Catholic faith and an appropriate level of maturity and mental and physical health that the rigors of religious life require. Candidates who do not meet specific standards set by both Church law and the individual religious institute are not admitted to religious life.

Can married people enter religious? Widowed and divorced?

Religious life in the Roman Catholic Church is reserved for celibates only. Some religious institutes have accepted widowed and divorced people who have had their marriages properly annulled by the Church.

What are the vows of religious life?

The main vows for apostolic women and men in religious life are chastity, poverty, and obedience. Individual institutes may require additional vows. Monastics profess vows of stability, obedience and fidelity/*conversatio* to the monastic way of life, which includes chastity and living simply. By stability, a monastic binds themselves to a specific monastery.

What is the National Religious Vocation Conference?

The National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) was founded in 1988 as a professional organization of men and women committed to vocation awareness, invitation, and discernment to consecrated life as brothers, sisters, and priests. The NRVC has an annual membership of almost 1,000 members representing over 350 religious institutes and organizations. The organization is divided into 12 member areas plus international members from 22 countries beyond the United States. The NRVC serves its members by providing education, resources, and services for professional growth.

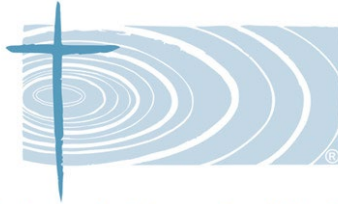
What is VISION Vocation Guide?

VISION Vocation guide is a print, online, and digital resource for those interested in entering religious life. Published by TrueQuest Communications on behalf of the National Religious Vocation Conference, VISION is distributed throughout the U.S. and Canada in print and around the world in its digital format. VISION articles and features are also available in Spanish and French online. The magazine is in its 22nd year of publication. In 2006, VISION launched its popular VocationMatch.com service which assists those discerning a religious vocation to narrow their search for the right community. An annual VocationMatch.com Survey on Vocations helps track current trends.

POOR HANDMAIDS OF JESUS CHRIST

AMERICAN PROVINCE

Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ



Partners in the work of the Spirit

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(All responses pertain only to the American province of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ.)

What is an acceptable age for those requesting application to candidacy with the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ?

Generally, the acceptable age for application to candidacy with the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ is between 20 and 45 years of age.

What is the length of time required for a convert to Catholicism before requesting application to candidacy with the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ?

Generally, a minimum of three years is required before application to candidacy with the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ.

What is the length of time required following the death of a spouse before requesting application to candidacy with the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ?

Generally, a minimum of two years is required between the death of a spouse and application to candidacy with the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ.

What is the length of time required following the divorce of one's spouse before requesting application to candidacy with the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ?

Generally, a minimum of two years is required between the divorce from one's spouse and application to candidacy with the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ.

What is the length of time required following the reception of the writ of annulment from one's spouse before requesting application to candidacy with the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ?

Generally, a minimum of one year is required between the reception of the writ of annulment from one's spouse and application to candidacy with the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ.

What is the length of time required for a person in recovery from an addiction and requesting application to candidacy with the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ?

Generally, a minimum of three years of recovery is required before a person with an addiction can begin application to candidacy with the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ.

What would hold a candidate back from acceptance into candidacy?

An individual with a record of pedophilia or sexual misconduct is not eligible for entrance into the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ.

Behavioral and psychological assessments are required prior to candidacy.

Women with dependent children are not eligible for entrance into the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ.

Not following or completing directives in one's divorce decree or annulment would make a woman ineligible for entrance into the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ.