

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



**Women Religious: Social Media Use Survey (*Phase II*)
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 sisters and nuns in Catholic religious congregations, provinces, regions, delegations, monasteries, and other entities present in the United States. The focus of the report is on the internet use in general, on various specific forms of online activity, and on the role of internet in the process of discerning religious life.

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) sent the survey to leaders in 561 units of religious institutes. The leader was asked to distribute copies of the survey to all sisters in their unit. CARA received 6,833 valid responses.

Overall, the sample includes sisters and nuns of all ages, levels of education, residing in each of the 48 contiguous states as well as in the District of Columbia, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico. The sample also includes women religious currently residing abroad (assuming that they belong to the units present in the United States).

Major Findings

Demographics and Background

- The vast majority of women religious were born in the US and its territories (93 percent). Almost all women religious (97.5 percent) were born in 6 countries (US, Ireland, Mexico, Vietnam, Canada, and Philippines). The remaining 2.5 percent were born in 51 other countries.

- On average, sisters and nuns are 71 years old (a median of 74 years old). A quarter of these women religious is 67 years old or younger. Only 4 percent of all respondents belong to the Millennial Generation (i.e., born after 1981).
- The vast majority of sisters and nuns (89 percent) considered religious life for the first time before they turned 21 years old.
- One in two sisters and nuns (51 percent) professed (or expect to profess) final vows (i.e., perpetual commitment) when they were (or will be) up to 25 years old.
- Almost half of the sisters and nuns who live in the United States reside in the Midwest (46 percent).

General Internet Use

- Only 6 percent of sisters and nuns do not use the internet. Over a half (52 percent) of sisters and nuns buy or sell items on the internet and the vast majority (91 percent) sends and receives email.
- Almost all sisters and nuns (98 percent) have regular access to a computer or laptop.
- The vast majority of sisters and nuns (84 percent) who use the internet, do so at least once a day.
- A subgroup of sisters and nuns born after 1995 (n=56) feels “a little” that social media was very helpful when they were discerning a call to religious life (an average of 2.4 on a four-point scale ranging from 1=“not at all” to 4=“very much”).
- Almost half (45 percent) of sisters and nuns say they need more training or instruction with computer. On average, younger sisters and nuns (women religious-Millennials born after 1981) are less likely to feel in need of training than other sisters and nuns (women religious born in 1981 or earlier) by 8 percentage points.

Specific Kinds of Activities on the Internet

- The vast majority (85 percent) of sisters and nuns reads news articles and feature stories online. Almost a third (32 percent) read or follow blogs. One in ten (11 percent) have their own blog or are part of a group that blogs. Among those who blog, the majority (52 percent) posts to this blog less than once a month.
- Almost a third (32 percent) of all sisters and nuns have participated in a chat, facilitated a chatroom, or moderated a chatroom. Among those who chat, three quarters (75 percent) use chat less than once a month.

- Less than a quarter (22 percent) of sisters and nuns visit a forum or discussion board on their Institute’s website or elsewhere on the internet. Over a half (68 percent) of those who visit a forum or discussion board, do it less than once a week.
- A majority of sisters and nuns (56 percent) watch or listen to events that are livestreamed over the internet. A half (50 percent) of those who visit forums and discussion boards, do so less than once a month. One third (32 percent) of all sisters and nuns watch or listen to livestreamed events focusing on general information or providing entertainment. One in 25 sisters and nuns (4 percent) have organized or produced a livestreaming event.
- Over a quarter of sisters and nuns (26 percent) listen to podcasts. Among those who listen to podcasts, over a half (54 percent) do so less than once a month. Out of all responding sisters and nuns, 14 percent listen to podcasts focusing on general information and/or providing entertainment. One in 20 sisters and nuns (5 percent) stated that they have created a podcast.
- The sisters and nuns who use social media in general at least once a day constitute almost a half of the respondents (45 percent). Out of all responding sisters and nuns, 52 percent use YouTube and 44 percent use Facebook. Facebook is among the social media sites used the most.
- On average, responding sisters and nuns reported that meeting people who may be interested in a vocation to religious life is “a little” important reason for them to use social media (an average of 1.8 on a four-point scale ranging from 1=“not at all” to 4=“very much”). It ranked last behind connecting with family and friends, being informed, inspired or entertained, connecting with others in the Institute, connecting with people related to their ministry, and publishing their own content or messages.
- The majority of sisters and nuns (67 percent) use video sites such as YouTube or Vimeo. Over one third (35 percent) who use these sites do so at least once a week. The most frequently selected reason for using these sites is for general information and/or entertainment (45 percent of all sisters and nuns).
- Relative to all responding sisters and nuns, the younger sisters and nuns (women religious-Millennials born after 1981) are 5 percentage points less likely to visit a forum or discussion board, 3 percentage points less likely to read or follow blogs, 2 percentage points less likely to use podcasts, almost equally likely to watch or listen to events that are livestreamed over the internet, and 8 percentage points more likely to use video sites such as YouTube or Vimeo.

Internet Use and Religious Discernment

- Among the survey participants who considered religious life for the first time after 1980 the following was used during religious discernment: websites of religious Institutes (45 percent), videos (27 percent), vocation- or discernment-oriented websites (27 percent), diocesan websites (18 percent), newspaper or magazine websites (16 percent), social media (16 percent), blogs (12 percent), forums or discussion boards (7 percent), podcasts (5 percent), livestreaming events (3 percent), and chat rooms (2 percent).¹
- Among the survey participants who considered religious life for the first time after 1980 the following internet activities were reported: read or listened to information about a specific Institute (44 percent), read or listened to information about religious life in general (38 percent), interacted with Catholic sisters and nuns (26 percent), and connected with others who were discerning a call to religious life (20 percent).

¹ Websites came into existence over 25 years ago. Social media platforms were introduced much later, e.g., MySpace 2002, Facebook 2004, YouTube in 2005, followed by many more.