

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

***The Influence of College Experiences on  
Vocational Discernment to  
Priesthood and Religious Life***

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**The Influence of College Experiences on Vocational Discernment to  
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**Executive Summary**

This report presents the results of a 2012 CARA survey of men in formation or newly ordained for Catholic archdioceses, dioceses and religious institutes in United States. Commissioned by Boston College and the Jesuit Conference-USA in 2011, the survey was designed to assess the role and influence of Catholic colleges and universities on the vocational discernment of men entering the seminary and religious life in the United States. Between April 2012 and June 2012, CARA distributed the survey to a total of 5,246 men known and identified by church leaders to be in formation or recently ordained. A total of 1,575 men (or 30 percent of those who had been sent surveys) completed the questionnaire, making it one of the largest recent surveys of men in formation and the newly ordained.

The analysis presented here pays particular attention to the ways in which the activities and experiences of men who attended Catholic colleges and universities are/were similar to, or different from, those of men who attended non-Catholic colleges and universities. In making these comparisons, CARA identifies the distinct and identifiable factors at Catholic colleges and universities that influence vocational discernment to diocesan priesthood or religious life. Throughout this report, the term “diocese” is used to refer to both archdioceses and dioceses, the term “religious institute” is used to refer to religious institutes and societies of apostolic life, and the term “college” is used to refer to both colleges and universities.

The survey asked respondents about: the nature of their contact with priests and religious men and women while they were/are in college; their college coursework; the nature and frequency of their involvement with campus ministry, vocational discernment programs, and/or Catholic parishes both on and off campus; the nature and frequency of their prayer, Mass attendance, and devotional practices while in college; their experiences with retreats, spiritual direction, service activities, and peer friendships while in college; the overall religious atmosphere of their college; and the nature and level of involvement in residential life and social activities on campus. After reporting on each of these topics, respondents were asked to evaluate the influence that each had on their own vocational discernment.

## Major Findings

### *Characteristics of Respondents*

- In terms of affiliation (i.e., diocesan or religious) and ordination status, two out of five respondents (or 40 percent) are in some stage of formation for diocesan priesthood, 28 percent are in formation for religious priesthood (i.e., they are affiliated with a religious institute), 23 percent are recently ordained diocesan priests, and 9 percent are recently ordained religious priests.
- Respondents to the survey range in age from 19 to 68, with the majority of respondents in the 25-34 year-old age range. Those affiliated with dioceses (i.e., those who are either in diocesan formation or who are ordained diocesan priests) are slightly younger than those affiliated with religious institutes.
- Over four out of five respondents (83 percent) were born in the United States, two percent were born in Canada or Europe, and 15 percent were born in other countries. Outside of the United States, the countries of birth with the highest representation in the sample are, in order of ranking: Mexico, Vietnam, the Philippines, Colombia, Nigeria, Canada, Uganda, El Salvador, and Poland.
- Nine out of ten respondents (89 percent) were baptized Catholics when they were infants, 5 percent when they were children or teenagers, and 7 percent when they were adults.
- The majority of respondents attended either public high schools (53 percent) or private, non-Catholic high schools (three percent). Twenty-two percent attended Catholic high schools run by religious institutes (e.g., by the Jesuits, Dominicans, Christian Brothers, etc.), 16 percent attended Catholic high schools operated by dioceses, and 8 percent attended Catholic independent high schools.
- Two out of five respondents (or 40 percent) attended a Catholic, non-seminary college for all or most of their college years, 8 percent attended a Catholic seminary college for all or most of their college years, and over half (52 percent) attended either a public (40 percent) or private, non-Catholic (12 percent) college for all or most of their college years.
- The most frequently cited reasons that respondents gave for their choice of college are the location, academic reputation, and affordability of the college. Those who attended non-Catholic colleges are the most likely to cite the college's location (74 percent) and affordability (73 percent) as their reasons for college choice. Those who attended Catholic, non-seminary colleges are the most likely to cite the college's religious affiliation (79 percent) and academic reputation (69 percent) as their reasons for college choice.

## ***College Activities and Experiences***

To identify the distinct and identifiable factors at Catholic colleges that may influence vocational discernment, CARA examined the ways in which the activities and experiences of men who attended Catholic, non-seminary colleges for all or most of their college years are/were similar to, or different from, those of men who attended non-Catholic colleges for all or most of their college years. (For reasons presented in the report, respondents whose college experiences involved a college seminary are omitted from these analyses and are instead the subject of Appendix I.) These analyses reveal:

- Those who attended a Catholic college are more likely to have been exposed to priests, sisters, or brothers as professors, administrators, and campus ministers during college. While nine out of ten of those who attended a Catholic college report having had a priest, sister, or brother as a college professor (88 percent), college administrator (93 percent) or campus minister (90 percent), substantially fewer of those who attended a non-Catholic college had a priest or religious as a professor (18 percent), administrator (15 percent), or campus minister (59 percent).
- Of those who attended a Catholic college, 91 percent report that Mass was available daily during college, and 90 percent report that they attended Mass at least once a week. Of those who attended a non-Catholic college, less than half (49 percent) report that Mass was available daily, and 79 percent state that they attended Mass at least once a week.
- Those who attended a Catholic college are more likely than those who attended a non-Catholic college to report having a regular spiritual direction during college (62 percent to 30 percent, respectively), and to have attended spiritual direction with greater frequency during college.
- Comparing the responses of those who attended Catholic and non-Catholic colleges reveals that 80 percent of those who attended a Catholic college report having participated in a religious retreat during college, compared to 59 percent of those who attended a non-Catholic college.
- While four out of five (78 percent) of those who attended a Catholic college report having participated in a service program during college, only three out of five (63 percent) of those who attended a non-Catholic college report likewise.
- Respondents who attended a Catholic college are more likely to report having engaged in a devotional practice during college, and to have engaged with greater frequency in a wider variety of devotional practices, than those who attended a non-Catholic college.

The only exception to this is with respect to Bible study, where non-Catholic college attenders report slightly higher levels of engagement in this particular practice.

- Respondents who attended a Catholic college are more likely to have participated in Campus Ministry activities during college than those who attended a non-Catholic college (72 percent to 58 percent, respectively).
- A Catholic college environment can provide opportunities for students to discuss their faith in an academic setting in ways that a non-Catholic college environment does not. Over half (51 percent) of those who attended Catholic colleges report having discussed faith, religion, and prayer “frequently” during class, compared to only 11 percent of those who attended non-Catholic colleges. Similarly, Catholic-college attenders are substantially more likely than their counterparts to report having discussed these topics with professors outside of class (43 percent to nine percent, respectively), and with students outside of class (62 percent to 40 percent, respectively).
- Those who attended Catholic colleges are more likely than those who did not to report that various groups on their campus expressed “some” or “very much” interest in faith, religion, and prayer. While 70 percent of Catholic college attenders report that the college as a whole showed “some” or “very much” interest in faith, religion, and prayer, only 20 percent of non-Catholic college attenders report likewise.
- Those who attended a Catholic college are more likely than those who attended a non-Catholic college to have lived in campus dorms (84 percent to 74 percent, respectively) and/or to have lived with roommates during college (83 percent to 77 percent, respectively). Those who attended a non-Catholic college are more likely than those who attended a Catholic college to have lived off campus (66 percent to 54 percent, respectively) or at home (42 percent to 23 percent, respectively).

### ***College Experiences Perceived to Influence Vocational Discernment***

Respondents to the survey were asked about the effects that these various activities and experiences in college had on their own vocational discernment. In analyzing the responses, CARA observed the following patterns:

- One of the most influential college experiences in terms of shaping respondents’ religious vocation is having a regular spiritual director. Of those who report having had a regular spiritual director during college, approximately two-thirds (65 percent) overall claim that having spiritual direction influenced their vocational discernment “very much.”

Furthermore, the level of reported influence does not vary much based on the type of college the respondent attended. Those who attended Catholic colleges, although substantially more likely than their counterparts to have a regular spiritual director during college, are only slightly more likely as those who attended non-Catholic colleges to state that spiritual direction was very influential in their vocational discernment (67 percent to 62 percent, respectively).

- Another highly influential college experience in terms of fostering vocational discernment is exposure to priests, sisters, or brothers in the roles of professor and campus minister. Almost two-thirds (64 percent) of respondents overall state that a priest/sister/brother *professor* had a “significant positive influence” on their vocational discernment, and over half (56 percent) report that a priest/sister/brother *campus minister* had a “significant positive influence” on their vocational discernment. Moreover, substantially more of the respondents who attended a Catholic college report that a priest/sister/brother *professor* had a “significant positive influence” on their vocational discernment than respondents who attended a non-Catholic college (72 percent to 46 percent, respectively). The same cannot be said with respect to having a priest/sister/brother as a *campus minister*, however; when asked about this, responses from those who attended a Catholic college are not substantially different than from those who attended a non-Catholic college (57 percent to 55 percent, respectively).
- Of those who attended a Catholic college, 59 percent report being encouraged in their vocational discernment by a campus minister, 72 percent report being encouraged by a professor, and 50 percent report being encouraged by a college staff member. Similar figures for non-Catholic college attenders are substantially lower: 46 percent report being encouraged by a campus minister, 25 percent report being encouraged by a professor, and 14 percent by a college staff member.
- Other college activities and experiences that influenced respondents’ vocational discernment, although not as influential as regular spiritual direction, are participation in a variety of prayer and devotional practices. Of those who participated in “other group prayer” (i.e., outside the Mass and Liturgy of the Hours) during college, 58 percent report that the practice had “very much” influence on their vocational discernment. Of those who engaged in Holy Hour devotions during college, 56 percent state that it had “very much” influence on their vocational discernment. Other similarly influential devotions, though not rated quite as high as these in terms of influence, are “other individual prayer/meditation” and Eucharistic Adoration, with 54 and 53 percent, respectively, reporting that these practices had “very much” influence on their vocational discernment. Moreover, respondents who attended a Catholic college are more likely than those who

attended a non-Catholic college to state that participating in these devotions during college had “very much” influence on their vocational discernment.

- Following these devotional practices, in the order of reported influence on vocational discernment, are “Come & See” events, participation in Mass, vocations events, vocation support groups, and retreat experiences. Among participants in these activities, 52 percent report that “Come & See” events and the Mass had “very much” influence on their vocational discernment, 42 percent claim that vocations events had “very much” influence, and 39 percent and 36 percent, respectively, state that vocation support groups and retreat experiences had “very much” influence. Furthermore, those who attended a Catholic college are substantially more likely than those who attended a non-Catholic college to report that their vocational discernment was “very much” influenced by Mass attendance (61 percent to 45 percent, respectively). Although a lower percentage of respondents indicate that homilies at Mass had “very much” influence on their discernment (19 percent overall), those who attended a Catholic college are more likely to report that the homilies had “very much” influence than those who attended a non-Catholic college (24 percent to 16 percent, respectively). There is no difference between those who attended a Catholic college and those who attended a non-Catholic college in their assessment of the influence of vocational discernment programs on their vocational discernment.
- Participating in religious retreats and being surrounded by a supportive group of friends during college are also reported to be influential on vocational discernment. Over a third of respondents (36 percent) claim that religious retreats during college influenced their vocational discernment “very much” and 28 percent reported likewise with respect to their friends. Moreover, those who attended a Catholic college are more likely than those who attended a non-Catholic college to report being positively influenced and supported by their college friends during their vocational discernment. There is no difference between those who attended a Catholic college and those who attended a non-Catholic college in their assessment of the influence of retreats and service programs on their vocational discernment.
- While 58 percent of those who attended a Catholic college report that a particular college course was “especially influential” on their vocational discernment, only 27 percent of those who attended a non-Catholic college report likewise.
- Approximately 40 percent of all respondents claim that an off-campus Catholic parish played a significant role in their vocational discernment. Those who attended a non-Catholic college are more likely than those who attended a Catholic college (46 percent



to 31 percent, respectively) to state that an off-campus parish was a significant factor in their vocational discernment.

- When asked to identify any individuals who have either encouraged or discouraged their vocational discernment, respondents are most likely to report having been *encouraged* in their vocational discernment by friends (72 percent), parish priests (71 percent), parents (58 percent), and campus ministry staff (51 percent). Friends and family are also identified as being among the individuals who have *discouraged* these men in their vocational discernment.
- Compared to those who attended a non-Catholic college, those who attended a Catholic college are: over three times more likely to report being encouraged in their vocational discernment by college staff (50 percent to 14 percent); almost three times more likely to be encouraged by a college professor (72 percent to 25 percent); twice as likely to be encouraged by a religious sister or brother; and substantially more likely to be encouraged parents, siblings, friends, and campus ministers.



## **Introduction**

In 2011, the Office of Faculty Outreach & Program Assessment at Boston College, in collaboration with the Jesuit Conference-USA, commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University to conduct a single informant survey of all seminarians, men in formation in religious institutes, and recently ordained priests affiliated with dioceses and religious institutes in the United States. The survey was designed to assess the role and influence of Catholic colleges and universities (hereafter simply referred to as colleges) on the vocational discernment of men entering the seminary and religious life in the United States. Between April 2012 and June 2012, CARA distributed the survey to 5,246 men known and identified by church leaders to be in formation or recently ordained. A total of 1,575 men completed the questionnaire, making it one of the largest recent surveys of men in formation and the newly ordained.

This report examines a variety of factors that are part of a college experience that may influence vocational discernment, with particular emphasis on the distinct and identifiable factors of influence at Catholic colleges that are not found at other private and public colleges. Another CARA report of these data examines the differences between those who attended Jesuit colleges and those who attended other Catholic colleges, as well as the differences between Jesuit and non-Jesuit respondents.

To obtain the names and contact information for men in formation for the priesthood or ordained to the priesthood between January 1, 2007 and December 31, 2011, CARA contacted the seminary rectors at the college- and theology-level seminaries or schools of theology that operate under the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Program of Priestly Formation, the major superiors of men's religious institutes belonging to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), and the Vicars for Clergy in the (arch)dioceses in the United States. CARA conducted extensive follow-up by mail, e-mail, and fax between February and April 2012 and eventually obtained responses, including the names and contact information for men in formation and newly ordained, from a total of 52 out of 72 seminary rectors, 147 out of 237 major superiors of men religious, and 133 out of 176 Vicars for Clergy, which together represent approximately 68 percent of all seminar rectors, major superiors, and Vicars for Clergy in the United States. These respondents provided names and reliable contact information for a total of 5,246 men in formation or recently ordained. An additional 196 names supplied did not have reliable or sufficient contact information and so were not included in the sample frame of 5,246 names and addresses. Of these names, approximately 25 percent were supplied by seminary rectors (who mostly identified men in formation for diocesan priesthood), 24 percent were supplied by major superiors of religious institutes, and 51 percent were supplied by diocesan Vicars for Clergy (who reported the names of men recently ordained in their dioceses or archdioceses). Throughout this report, the term "diocese" is used to refer to both dioceses and

archdioceses, the term “religious institute” is used to refer to religious institutes and societies of apostolic life, and the term “college” is used to refer to both colleges and universities.

Beginning in April, 2012, CARA mailed and emailed survey questionnaires to these 5,246 men. After extensive follow-up by email through June, 2012, CARA obtained completed surveys from 1,575 men, for a response rate of 30 percent, which is a respectable response rate for a survey of this nature. Only a small number of respondents (93) completed paper questionnaires; the remainder completed the survey online.

To establish whether these respondents are representative of the target population, CARA compared the characteristics of the men who responded (the sample) with data reported in the *Official Catholic Directory* as well as data that CARA gathers annually through its censuses of seminarians, as reported in its *Catholic Ministry Formation Directory* (2011). These comparisons suggest that the sample fairly represents the population of interest (i.e., men in formation or recently ordained). Respondents to the survey represent 46 different seminaries, 84 different religious institutes, and 109 different dioceses across all regions of the United States. While 83 percent of the men in our sample were born in the United States, CARA’s annual census of seminarians in U.S. theologates reveals that the percentage of seminarians born in the United States ranges from 70-75 percent. Overall, no response biases were detected, but we did observe that a slightly higher percentage of the men listed by major superiors of religious institutes completed and returned the survey questionnaire than men listed by seminary rectors or by diocesan Vicars for Clergy.

All respondents were given an eight-page, 125-question survey to complete either online or in hard-copy form. The questionnaire asked respondents about: the nature of their contact with priests and religious men and women while they were/are in college; their college coursework; the nature and frequency of their involvement with campus ministry, vocational discernment programs, and/or Catholic parishes both on and off campus; the nature and frequency of their prayer, Mass attendance, and devotional practices while in college; their experiences with retreats, spiritual direction, service activities, and peer friendships while in college; the overall religious atmosphere of their college; and the nature and level of involvement in residential life and social activities on campus. Following each of the topics presented on the questionnaire, respondents were asked to evaluate the influence that each of these aspects of their college experience had on their own vocational discernment. The survey also asked respondents about their personal background characteristics and their reasons for deciding to attend the college they attended.

## Organization of the Report

This report is divided into three main parts:

- Part I provides a summary of the characteristics of survey respondents. This summary includes the characteristics of *all* respondents, including those who reported attending a seminary college. However, because the intent of this report is to determine what aspects of the college experience have led men to enter the seminary or formation programs for diocesan priesthood or religious life, CARA removed from the analyses presented in Parts II and III the 143 respondents who report that they attended a seminary college. The rationale for doing this is straightforward: men who report attending a college seminary presumably have already entered into formation for a diocese or religious institute, and because of that, their responses to many of the question items regarding their college experiences are likely to be more extreme (e.g., higher levels of Mass attendance, higher levels of devotional practice, etc.). In the interest of not allowing this subgroup to bias results with respect to the influence of attending Catholic colleges in general, this group has been analyzed separately.
- Part II explores the ways in which attending a Catholic (non-seminary) college may have fostered the vocational discernment of the men in the sample. Specifically, it examines how the activities and experiences of men who attended a Catholic college for all or most of their college years are different from those of men who attended a non-Catholic college (i.e., public or non-Catholic private college) for all or most of their college years. Throughout this report, those who attended a Catholic college for all or most of their college years are referred to as having attended a Catholic college (or “Catholic college attenders”), and those who attended a public or private, non-Catholic college for all or most of their college years are referred to as having attended a non-Catholic college (or “non-Catholic college attenders”).
- Part III focuses on what respondents claim as the effects of these various college activities and experiences (as outlined in Part II) on their own vocational discernment.
- Appendix I presents findings with respect to those who attended a college seminary, and shows how the college activities and experiences of this group of respondents differ from the activities and experiences of other respondents with differing levels of exposure to Catholic college environments.
- Appendix II presents a copy of the questionnaire along with the valid percentage of respondents who answered each response category. Here, readers can see the exact wording of questions and how responses are distributed across response options.

- Appendix III presents all of the answers that respondents provided to the “open-ended” or “free-response” questions which asked respondents to answer in their own words.

### **Interpreting this Report**

Many of the questions on the survey use four-point response scales (for example, “not at all,” “a little,” “some,” and “very much” or “no influence,” “a little influence,” “some influence,” and “very much influence”). Tables summarizing responses to questions that use these scales usually will not include percentages for each response category. Instead, they will usually report the percentage of those who responded in the most positive category (e.g., “very much influence”), since the most positive response sometimes distinguishes important contrasts in level of support. This is especially useful for this survey since many respondents tended to give “positive” responses but not always the *most* positive responses. Readers who wish to see what percentage of respondents selected the other response categories may refer to the copy of the questionnaire in Appendix II.

In general, in making comparisons between those who attended Catholic colleges and those who attended non-Catholic colleges, tables will show the percentage of each subgroup who responded in the most positive category. Whenever the difference in percentages between these groups approaches or exceeds 10 percent, this difference is considered notable or important.

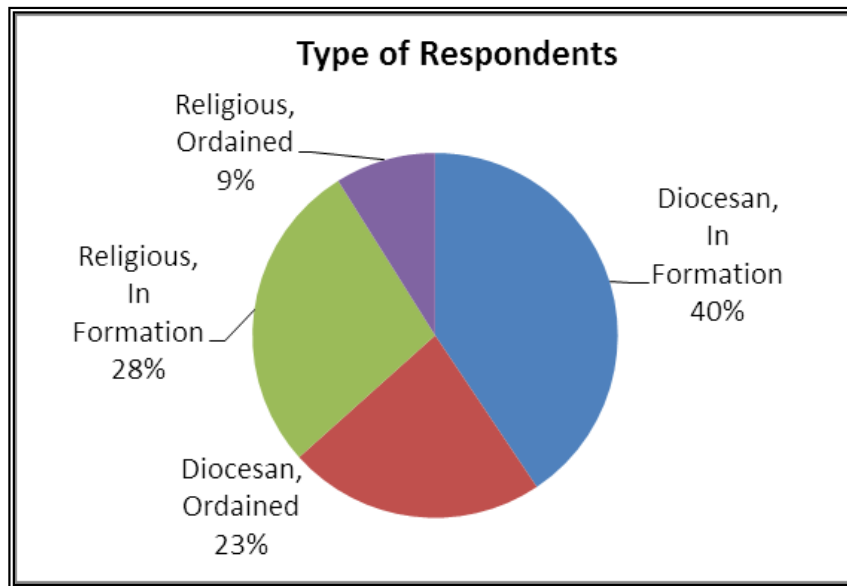
## Part I: Characteristics of Respondents

This section of the report describes the characteristics of survey respondents. This summary includes the characteristics of *all* respondents, including those who report attending (or having attended) a seminary college.

### *Affiliation and Ordination Status*

The 1,575 respondents to the survey represent 46 different seminaries, 84 different religious institutes, and 109 different dioceses across all regions of the United States.<sup>1</sup> Almost four in ten respondents (i.e., 577 of the 1,575 respondents or 37 percent) are affiliated with religious institutes, and over six in ten (i.e., 998 of the 1,575 respondents or 63 percent) are affiliated with dioceses. Of the 1,563 men who responded to the question about their ordination status, 490 (or 31 percent) reported being ordained within the last five years. The other 1,073 men (or 69 percent) are in formation either in the seminary or in one of the other stages of formation for a religious institute, such as novitiate.

When we examine the characteristics of respondents in terms of both their affiliation (i.e., diocesan or religious) and their status as ordained or in formation, we find that the largest group are those who are in formation for a diocese. As the figure below indicates, 40 percent of respondents are in some stage of formation for diocesan priesthood, 28 percent are in formation for religious priesthood, 23 percent are recently ordained diocesan priests, and 9 percent are recently ordained religious priests.



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<sup>1</sup> These figures are out of 72 seminaries, 237 religious institutes, and 176 dioceses.

### ***Age Distribution***

Respondents to the survey range in age from 19 to 68. The oldest respondent reports being born in 1944 and the youngest respondent was born in 1993.

<b>Age Distribution of Respondents</b>					
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>					
	<b>All</b>	<b>Diocesan In Formation</b>	<b>Diocesan Ordained</b>	<b>Religious In Formation</b>	<b>Religious Ordained</b>
Under Age 19	1%	2%	0%	<1%	0%
Age 20-24	15	30	<1	11	0
Age 25-29	27	34	15	35	0
Age 30-34	24	16	40	26	16
Age 35-39	13	4	18	13	38
Age 40-44	7	4	7	5	24
Age 45-49	6	4	8	4	10
Age 50-54	3	2	3	5	5
Age 55-59	3	2	5	1	3
Age 60-64	1	1	1	1	3
Age 65-69	1	1	2	0	1
Average Age	33	30	37	32	41

As the table above illustrates:

- The majority of respondents are in the 25-34 year-old age range (i.e., 27 percent are aged 25-29, and 24 percent are aged 30-34).
- Those in diocesan formation are slightly younger than those in religious formation: 30 percent of the men in diocesan formation are aged 20-24; only 11 percent of men in religious formation are aged 20-24.
- This same disparity in age between diocesan and religious is evident among the respondents who are ordained: 56 percent of the ordained diocesan priests in the sample are below the age of 35; only 16 percent of the ordained religious priests are below that age.



### ***Country of Birth***

Eighty-three percent of the respondents were born in the United States, 2 percent were born in Canada or Europe, and 15 percent were born in other countries. Outside of the United States, the countries of birth with the highest representation among respondents are, in order of ranking: Mexico, with 48 respondents reporting Mexico as their country of birth; Vietnam with 44 respondents; the Philippines with 22 respondents; Colombia with 18 respondents; Nigeria with nine respondents; Canada with seven respondents; Uganda with five respondents; and El Salvador and Poland, with four respondents each.

<b>Country of Birth</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
	<b>Survey Respondents</b>	<b>Priests Nationally<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Seminarians in Theologates Nationally<sup>3</sup></b>
United States	83%	89%	70%
Canada or Europe	2	6	} 30
Other International	15	5	

### ***Age of Becoming Catholic***

Nearly all respondents (89 percent) were baptized Catholics when they were infants. As the table below indicates, 7 percent of respondents converted to Catholicism as adults.

<b>Age of Becoming Catholic</b>	
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>	
	<b>All</b>
Infant (under age 1)	89%
Child (ages 1-12)	3
Teenager (ages 13-17)	2
Adult (ages 18 and over)	7

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<sup>2</sup> These data are drawn from a 2009 survey of a nationally representative sample of Catholic priests in the United States conducted by The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University and reported by Gautier, Perl, and Fichter (2011:9).

<sup>3</sup> As reported in the CARA Ministry Formation Directory (2011).

### ***Parents' Religious Identification***

Nearly all respondents (92 percent) report having a Catholic mother and 86 percent report having a Catholic father.

<b>Parents' Religious Identification</b>	
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>	
	<b>All</b>
Catholic Mother	92%
Catholic Father	86

### ***Type of High School Attended***

The majority of men in this sample report having attended either public high schools (53 percent) or private, non-Catholic high schools (3 percent). Twenty-two percent attended Catholic high schools run by religious institutes (e.g., by the Jesuits, Dominicans, Christian Brothers), 16 percent attended Catholic high schools operated by dioceses, and 8 percent attended Catholic independent high schools. Compared to the percentage of all Catholics who enroll in Catholic schools, the proportion among these respondents is relatively high.<sup>4</sup>

<b>Type of High School Attended</b>	
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>	
	<b>All</b>
Public	53%
Catholic (religious)	22
Catholic (diocesan)	16
Catholic (independent)	8
Private (non-Catholic)	3

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<sup>4</sup> In his recent book *Catholic High Schools: Facing the New Realities* (2011), James Heft, a Marianist priest and educator, estimates that while nearly half of young Catholics went to Catholic schools in 1965, only about 15 percent of young Catholics attend these schools today. Similarly, the 2011 *CARA Catholic Poll* finds that among a nationally representative sample of adult Catholics, 79 percent report having attended a public high school, while 21 percent report having attended a Catholic or private school.

### ***Type of College Attended***

Respondents were asked to name the college or university which they attended the longest, to identify whether that college or university was public, Catholic, or other religious affiliation, and in the case that they attended more than one college or university, to name that college or university. Responses to this series of questions reveals that 52 percent attended either a public (40 percent) or private, non-Catholic college (12 percent) for all or most of their college years, and 39 percent of respondents attended a Catholic college for all or most of their college years. Compared to the percentage of all Catholics who enroll in Catholic colleges, the proportion among these respondents is relatively high.<sup>5</sup>

<b>Type of College Attended the Longest</b>	
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>	
	<b>All</b>
Public	40%
Catholic	39
Private (non-Catholic)	12
College Seminary	8

Of those who report having attended more than one college or university, 47 percent report that the additional college was public, 31 percent report that it was Catholic, 14 percent that it was private, non-Catholic, and 9 percent that it was a seminary college.

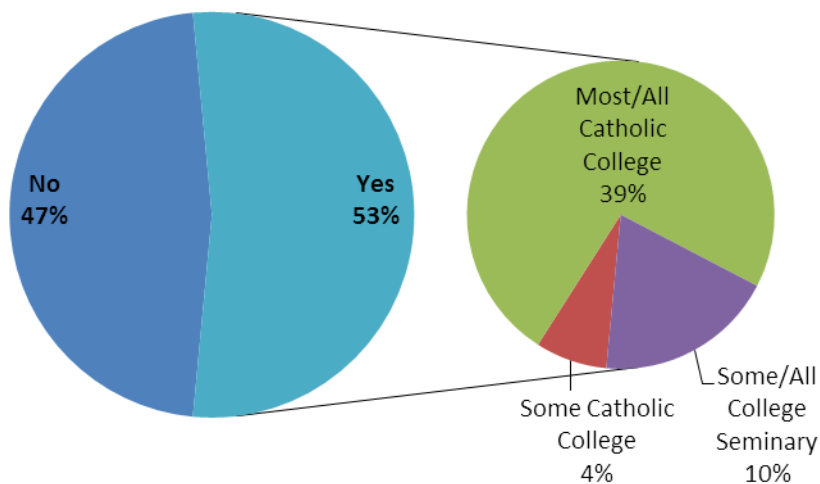
Taking these two questions together, 53 percent of respondents attended a Catholic college for at least some of their college experience, and 47 percent of respondents had no exposure whatsoever to a Catholic college environment. As the figure below illustrates, the 53 percent of respondents who report having at least some exposure to a Catholic college environment can be broken down as follows:

- Thirty-nine percent attended a Catholic college for all or most of their college years.
- Ten percent attended a Catholic seminary college for all or some of their college years.
- Four percent had some exposure to a Catholic college environment, but most of their college years were spent in a non-Catholic context.

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<sup>5</sup> The 2011 *CARA Catholic Poll* finds that among a nationally representative sample of adult Catholics, 93 percent report having attended a public or private, non-Catholic college, while 7 percent report having attended a Catholic college.

Attended a Catholic College at Any Time



### ***Participation in Extracurricular Activities during College***

Respondents were also asked to report on their participation in extracurricular activities during college. The table below lists the activities in which respondents report involvement, ranked from highest to lowest levels of participation.

<b>Participated “Periodically” or “Regularly” in These Activities</b>	
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>	
	<b>All</b>
Clubs/Student Organizations	56%
Athletics or Intramural Sports	48
Campus Ministry	46
Drama/Music	32
Student Government	19
Parish Young Adult Group	18
Knights of Columbus	15
Residential Life (Resident Assistant, Residential Minister, etc.)	15
Academic Fraternity	11
Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS)	9
Greek Fraternity	8
R.O.T.C.	4

As the table reports:

- More than half (56 percent) of respondents report participating periodically or regularly in clubs and student organizations during college.
- A third to about half of respondents report participating periodically or regularly in athletics or intramural sports (48 percent), campus ministry (46 percent), and drama and/or music (32 percent) during college.
- Close to one in five reports participating periodically or regularly in student government (19 percent), parish young adult groups (18 percent), Knights of Columbus (15 percent), and residential life (15 percent) during college.
- A tenth or fewer participated periodically or regularly in academic fraternities (11 percent), Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) (9 percent), Greek fraternities (8 percent), and R.O.T.C. (4 percent).

### ***Reasons for Choice of College Attended***

All respondents were asked to identify the reasons for their choice of college. Many respondents indicate several factors that weighed upon their decision. The table below summarizes the results from a question about the level of importance several factors played in their selection of a college. Specifically, it shows the percentage of respondents who report whether the factor influenced their choice either “some” or “very much.”

<b>Reasons for Choosing College or University</b>				
<i>Percentage in each category reporting “some” or “very much” importance:</i>				
		<u>Type of College Attended the Longest:</u>		
	<b>All</b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>	<b>College Seminary</b>
Location of College	68%	74%	62%	55%
Academic Reputation of College	67	68	69	50
Affordability of College	61	73	48	43
Size of College	49	41	61	43
Family Encouragement	42	40	45	42
Religious Affiliation of College	40	7	79	60
Teacher Encouragement	28	27	29	28
Other	78	68	88	93

Examining the responses of all respondents reveals the following patterns:

- Besides the “other” category, the most frequently cited reasons for choice of college are the location, academic reputation, and affordability of the college. Approximately two-thirds of respondents regard one or more of these three factors as being of “some” or “very much” importance for their selection of college. Sixty-eight percent of all respondents state that the location of the college was of “some” or “very much” importance, 67 percent report that the academic reputation was of “some” or “very much” importance, and 61 percent claim that the affordability was of “some” or “very much” importance.
- Almost half of the respondents cite either the size of the college (49 percent), the encouragement of family (42 percent), or the religious affiliation of the college (40 percent) as being of “some” or “very much” importance for choosing their college.
- Less than a third of respondents indicate that their teacher’s encouragement was of “some” or “very much” importance in their selection of college.

Comparing the responses of each of the distinct subgroups – i.e., those who attended non-Catholic colleges, Catholic colleges, and seminary colleges – reveals the following patterns:

- Those who attended a non-Catholic college are the most likely to cite the location of the college (74 percent) and the affordability of the college (73 percent) as their reasons for college choice.
- Those who attended a Catholic non-seminary college are the most likely to cite the college's religious affiliation (79 percent) and academic reputation (69 percent) as their reasons for college choice.
- Those who attended (or are attending) a Catholic seminary college are the least likely to cite the college's location (55 percent), academic reputation (50 percent), or affordability (43 percent) as their reasons for college choice, but they were the most likely to report "other" factors (93 percent) as guiding their decision. Often these other factors included such things as: the fact that it was a seminary college; they were assigned there by their bishop, vocation director, diocese, religious superior, or religious institute; the will of God; and the encouragement or recommendation of a parish priest.





## **Part II: College Activities and Experiences**

This part of the report describes the college activities and experiences reported by respondents with varying levels of exposure to Catholic college environments. Specifically, it explores the ways in which the activities and experiences of men who attended Catholic colleges for all or most of their college years differ from those of men who attended non-Catholic colleges for all or most of their college years. This section reports differences in: their exposure to priests and religious on the faculty, administration or staff, and campus ministry teams of their colleges; their access to and participation in Mass, retreats, service, and campus ministry programs; their exposure to an atmosphere of respect for the discussion and practice of faith and prayer both inside and outside of the classroom; and their participation in college courses that reportedly had an influence on their vocational discernment. Part III of the report analyzes what these men said about the effects of these experiences and activities on their own vocational discernment.

As noted in the Introduction, because the intent of this report is to determine what aspects of the college experience have led men to enter the seminary or formation programs for diocesan priesthood or religious life, CARA removed from these analyses the 112 respondents who reported that they attended a seminary college for all or most of their college years, as well as the 31 respondents who indicated that they attended a seminary college for some of their college years. The rationale for doing this is straightforward: men who reported attending a college seminary presumably have already entered into formation for a diocese or religious institute, and because of that, we would expect their responses to many of the question items regarding their college experiences to be more extreme (e.g., higher levels of Mass attendance, higher levels of devotional practice, etc.) In the interest of not allowing this subgroup to bias the results with respect to the influence of attending Catholic colleges in general, this group has been removed from the analyses reported in Parts II and III of this report. Findings with respect to those who attended a college seminary are presented in Appendix I at the conclusion of the report. Throughout Parts II and III of this report, therefore, findings presented in the tables under the category heading “All” refer to findings based on all respondents *except* those who attended a seminary college.

### ***Exposure to Priests, Sisters, and Brothers in College***

Respondents were asked in separate questions whether any of their professors, college administrators or staff, or campus ministers at their college were priests, sisters, or brothers. Responses reveal that respondents overall are more likely during college to have been exposed to a priest, sister, or brother serving in the role of a campus minister than serving in the role of an administrator, staff member, or a professor. Seventy-three percent of all respondents state that at least one of their campus ministers during college was a priest, sister, or brother, 49 percent report that at least one of their college administrators or staff members was a priest, sister, or brother, and 48 percent indicate that at least one of their college professors was a priest, sister, or brother.

<b>Exposure to Priests, Sisters, and Brothers during College as...</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
	<u>Type of College Attended the Longest:</u>		
	<b>All<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
Campus Ministers	73%	59%	90%
Administrators or staff	49	15	93
Professors	48	18	88

As the table above illustrates:

- The least dramatic difference between the subgroups (i.e., between those who attended a Catholic college and those who attended a non-Catholic college) is in terms of their exposure to a priest, sister, or brother on the campus ministry staff, though even here the difference is noteworthy. Nine in ten (or 90 percent) of those who attended a Catholic college report having had a priest, sister, or brother as a campus minister during college, compared to only six in ten (or 59 percent) of those who attended a non-Catholic college.
- Whereas 93 percent of those who attended a Catholic college report having a priest, sister, or brother as a college administrator, only 15 percent of those who attended a non-Catholic college report the same.

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout Parts II and III of this report findings presented in the tables under the category heading “All” refer to findings based on all respondents *except* those who attended a seminary college.

- While 88 percent of those who attended a Catholic college report having a priest, sister, or brother as a college professor, only 18 percent of those who attended a non-Catholic college indicate the same.

### ***Mass Availability and Mass Attendance***

Almost all of those who attended a Catholic college report having had access to a Catholic chapel on campus during college (98 percent), while only one in two (or 50 percent) of those who attended a non-Catholic college report such access. Similarly, 91 percent of those who attended a Catholic college report that Mass was available daily during college, compared to only 49 percent of those who never attended a Catholic college.

<b>Mass Availability and Mass Attendance during College</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
	<b>All</b>	Type of College Attended the Longest:	
		<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
College had a Catholic chapel on campus	70%	50%	98%
College had Mass available on campus daily	68	49	91
Attended Mass at least once a week during college	84	79	90

- Of those who reported attending Mass during college (on-campus or otherwise), 84 percent overall report having attended at least once a week.
- This percentage is higher for those who attended a Catholic college (90 percent) than for those who attended a non-Catholic college (79 percent).

## *Spiritual Direction*

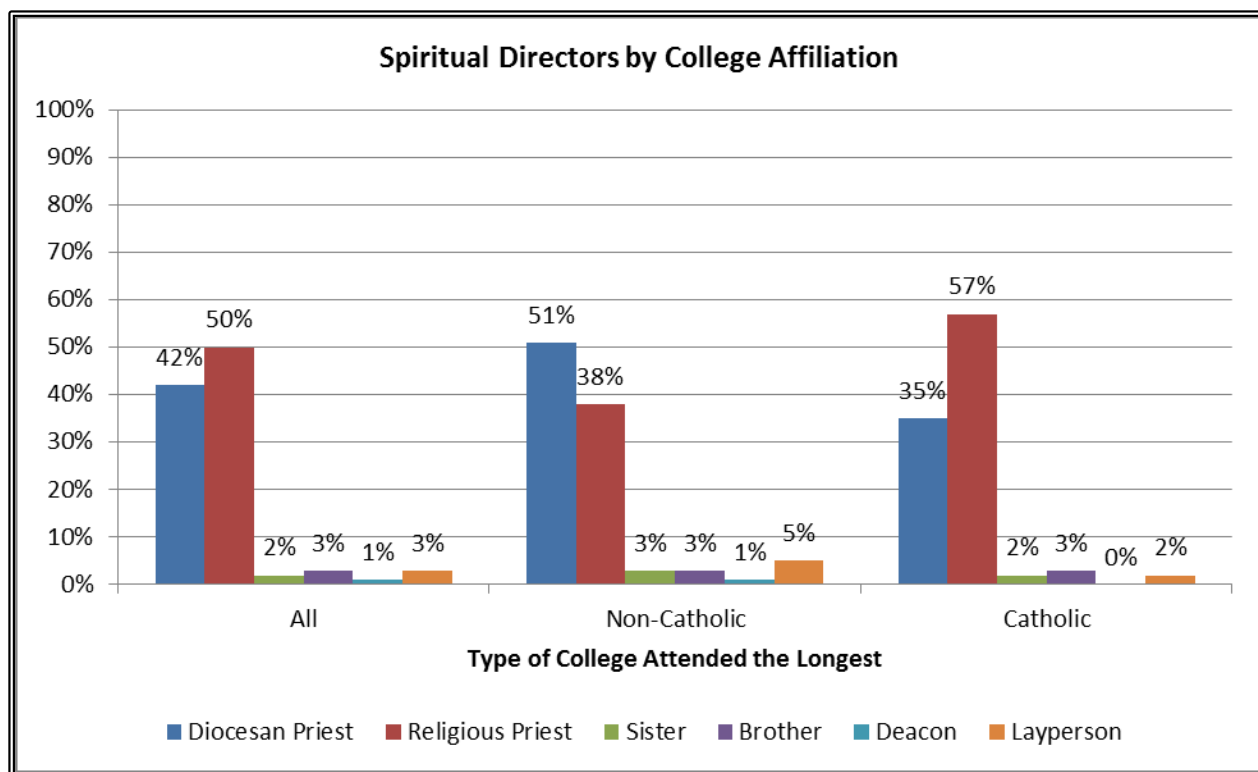
Respondents were asked a series of questions pertaining to spiritual direction during college. Those who identified as having had a regular spiritual director during college were asked about the frequency of their meetings and the canonical status of their spiritual director (i.e., whether he/she was a diocesan priest, religious priest, sister, brother, deacon, or layperson).

<b>Participation in Spiritual Direction during College</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
		Type of College Attended the Longest:	
	<b>All</b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
Had a regular Spiritual Director during college	44%	30%	62%
<i>(Of those who had a Spiritual Director,)</i> met at least monthly with him/her	86	81	89

As the table above illustrates:

- Almost half (44 percent) of those responding report having a regular spiritual director during college, and of those who report having a regular spiritual director during college, over three-fourths (86 percent overall) report having met with him/her at least monthly (i.e., either “monthly” or “more than monthly”) during college.
- Those who attended a Catholic college are more likely than those who attended a non-Catholic college to report having sought spiritual direction during college (62 percent to 30 percent, respectively), and to have attended spiritual direction with greater frequency.

Besides asking respondents about the frequency of their spiritual direction during college, respondents were also asked to indicate the canonical status of their spiritual director. As the figure below shows, of those men who report having had a spiritual director during college, 50 percent report that their spiritual director was a religious priest, 42 percent report that his spiritual director was a diocesan priest, and less than 10 percent report that his spiritual director was either a layperson (three percent), religious brother (three percent), religious sister (two percent), or deacon (one percent).



The figure above also illustrates that the canonical status of one's spiritual director during college is associated with the type of college he attended.

- Respondents who attended a Catholic college are more likely to have had a religious priest as a spiritual director during college. While 57 percent of Catholic college attenders report having a religious priest as a spiritual director, only 38 percent of non-Catholic college attenders report likewise.
- Those who attended a non-Catholic college are more likely to have had a diocesan priest as a spiritual director during college. While 51 percent of non-Catholic college attenders report having a diocesan priest as a spiritual director, only 35 percent of Catholic college attenders reported likewise.

### ***Participation in Retreats and Service Projects***

Two-thirds of respondents (67 percent) indicate that they participated in a religious retreat during college, and almost three-quarters of respondents (70 percent) state that they participated in service projects during college. As the table below illustrates, of those who attended religious retreats in college, the greatest percentage (56 percent overall) report that they participated in retreat(s) that were two- to three-days in duration, compared to 35 percent who participated in “day(s) of recollection” and 25 percent who participated in retreats that were four- or- more days in duration.

<b>Participation in Retreats and Service Projects during College</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
		Type of College Attended the Longest:	
	<b>All</b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
Participated in any Religious Retreats	67%	59%	80%
Participated in any Days of Recollection	35	30	42
Participated in any Two- to Three-Day Retreats	56	48	67
Participated in Any Four- or More Day Retreats	25	17	36
Participation in Service Projects	70	63	78

Comparing the responses of those who attended Catholic and non-Catholic colleges reveals the following:

- Four out of five (or 80 percent) of those who attended a Catholic college report having participated in a religious retreat during college, compared to less than three out of five (or 59 percent) of those who attended a non-Catholic college.
- Similar differences can be observed across all categories of religious retreats: “days of recollection,” two-to-three-day retreats, and four-or-more-day retreats. For all of these categories, those who attended a Catholic college are more likely than those who attended a non-Catholic college to report having attended a retreat during college.

- While almost four out of five (78 percent) of those who attended a Catholic college state that they participated in service programs or activities during college, only three out of five (63 percent) of those who attended a non-Catholic college report likewise.

<b>Average Number of Retreats and Service Projects Attended during College</b>			
<i>Average in each category:</i>			
		<u>Type of College Attended the Longest:</u>	
	<b>All</b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
Days of Recollection	5.7	5.4	5.9
Two- to Three-Day Retreats	4.9	5.8	4.1
Four- or More Day Retreats	3.4	4.4	2.8
Service Projects	0.7	0.6	1.0

As the table above illustrates, among respondents who report they attended retreats and service programs during college:

- Those who attended a Catholic college participated, on average, in more “days of recollection” (average=5.9) and service programs (average=1.0) than did those who attended a non-Catholic college (average=5.4 and 0.6, respectively).
- Non-Catholic college attenders report having participated in more of the longer duration retreats (i.e., two-to-three-day retreats and four-or-more-day retreats) than Catholic college attenders. Those who attended a non-Catholic college participated, on average, in nearly 6 two-to-three-day retreats, and over 4 four-or-more-day retreats.



### ***Devotional and Spiritual Practices***

A section of the survey asked respondents about their devotional and spiritual practices during college. It asked them to indicate whether and how frequently they participated in each of the eight practices listed in the table below. Almost nine in ten respondents (86 percent) report that they participated in at least one these practices during college. Of the various types of devotional and spiritual practices listed on the questionnaire, the most commonly reported practice among all respondents was praying the rosary, with 74 percent of respondents reporting that they had prayed the rosary during college. As the table below reports, the other types of devotional practices reported by respondents, listed by level of popularity, include: Eucharistic Adoration, with 72 percent reporting that they participated in it during college; other individual prayer, with 62 percent reporting; Liturgy of the Hours, with 56 percent reporting; Bible study, with 54 percent reporting; Holy Hour, with 53 percent reporting; Lectio Divina, with 42 percent reporting; and other group prayer, with 15 percent reporting.

<b>Participation in Devotional and Spiritual Practices during College</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
	<b>All</b>	<b>Type of College Attended the Longest:</b>	
		<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
Any Devotional or Spiritual Practices	86%	82%	91%
Rosary	74	69	80
Eucharistic Adoration	72	66	79
Other Individual Prayer	62	56	69
Liturgy of the Hours	56	48	67
Bible Study	54	57	51
Holy Hour	53	47	62
Lectio Divina	42	37	48
Other Group Prayer	15	14	17

As the table above shows:

- Respondents who attended a Catholic college are more likely to report having engaged in a devotional or spiritual practice during college than those who attended a non-Catholic college. Whereas 91 percent of those who attended a Catholic college report having

participated in at least one of these practices, 82 percent of those who attended a non-Catholic college reported likewise.

- A similar pattern is evident with respect to each of the distinct types of devotional and spiritual activities, except Bible Study, where non-Catholic college attenders report roughly equal, or slightly higher, engagement during their college years.

One way to explore the extent to which devotions become spiritual habits is to examine whether they are practiced on a weekly or more basis. As the table below indicates, those who attended a Catholic college are more likely than those who attended a non-Catholic college to have developed habits during college with respect to all categories of devotion except Bible Study and “other group prayer.”

<b>Participation in Devotional and Spiritual Practices</b> <b>“At Least Once a Week” during College</b> <i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
		Type of College Attended the Longest:	
	All	Non-Catholic	Catholic
Other Individual Prayer	56%	52%	60%
Rosary	44	42	47
Liturgy of the Hours	39	27	52
Eucharistic Adoration	37	29	45
Holy Hour	29	21	39
Bible Study	20	23	17
Lectio Divina	16	14	18
Other Group Prayer	9	8	10

### ***Participation in Campus Ministry***

Multiple questions asked respondents whether and how often they participated in campus ministry related activities during college. Overall, 86 percent of respondents report having a Catholic campus ministry program at the college that they attended. Of those with a Catholic campus ministry program at their college, 36 percent report that the campus ministry program was part of a Newman Center.

<b>Participation in Campus Ministry during College</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
	<b>All</b>	Type of College Attended the Longest:	
		<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
There was a Catholic Campus Ministry Program at the College Attended	86%	80%	95%
The Catholic Campus Ministry was Part of a Newman Center	36	62	7
Participated in Campus Ministry <sup>7</sup>	64	58	72
Participated in the Social Activities of Campus Ministry	64	60	69
Participated in the Service Activities of Campus Ministry	49	43	58
Was a part of a Campus Ministry Leadership Team	29	30	27

As the table above illustrates:

- Nearly two thirds of respondents (64 percent) report that they participated in campus ministry during college. A similar percentage report that they participated in the social activities of campus ministry.

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<sup>7</sup> These figures reporting rates of participation in campus ministry, the social and service activities of campus ministry, and campus ministry leadership teams are based on all respondents, including even those respondents who indicated that their college did not have a *Catholic* campus ministry program. This is because many respondents participated in campus ministry regardless of whether their college had a distinctly Catholic program.

- A smaller percentage of respondents (49 percent) report being engaged in the service activities of campus ministry, and fewer still (29 percent) indicate that they were part of the campus ministry leadership team at their college or university.
- Those who attended a Catholic college are more likely to have participated in campus ministry during college than those who attended a non-Catholic college. While 72 percent of Catholic college attenders report having participated in campus ministry during their college years, only 58 percent of those who attended a non-Catholic college report likewise. A very similar pattern is evident with respect to the participation in the social activities of campus ministry.
- Although 58 percent of Catholic college attenders report having participated in the service activities of campus ministry during their college years, only 43 percent of non-Catholic college attenders report likewise.
- There is no noteworthy difference in likelihood of involvement in campus ministry leadership teams between Catholic-college attenders (27 percent) and non-Catholic college attenders (30 percent).

### ***An Atmosphere of Respect for the Discussion and Practice of Faith and Prayer***

Respondents were asked to report how often they discussed faith, religion, and prayer in the classroom and with various people outside of class during college. Twenty-nine percent of respondents indicate that they “frequently” discussed faith, religion, and prayer in class during college. Almost half (49 percent) report that they discussed these things “frequently” with other students outside of class, over a third (37 percent) report that they discussed these things “frequently” with campus ministry staff, and a quarter (24 percent) with professors outside of class.

<b>“Frequently” Discussed Faith, Religion, and Prayer...</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
		Type of College Attended the Longest:	
	<b>All</b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
With Other Students Outside of Class	49%	40%	62%
With Campus Ministry Staff	37	35	41
In Class	29	11	51
With Professors Outside of Class	24	9	43

The table above shows how these percentages differ between those who attended Catholic colleges and those who attended non-Catholic colleges.

- The most dramatic difference between these groups is in terms of discussing faith, religion, and prayer in class or with professors or other students outside of class.
- Over half (51 percent) of those who attended Catholic colleges report discussing faith, religion, and prayer “frequently” during class, compared to only one out of ten (11 percent) of those who attended non-Catholic colleges.
- While 43 percent of the Catholic-college attenders report discussing these topics with professors outside of class, only 9 percent of non-Catholic college attenders report the same.
- While over three out of five (62 percent) of the Catholic-college attenders report discussing these topics with students outside of class, only two out of five (40 percent) of non-Catholic college attenders report likewise.

Clearly, a Catholic college environment provides opportunities for students to discuss their faith in an academic setting in ways that a non-Catholic college environment does not. In fact, the only forum in which non-Catholic college attenders discuss their faith with almost as high a frequency as Catholic-college attenders is in the campus ministry setting. While 41 percent of those who attended a Catholic college report having discussed faith with the campus ministry staff during college, 35 percent of those who attended a non-Catholic college report likewise.

The fact that Catholic college environments are more encouraging of the discussion of faith, religion, and prayer is also evident in the respondents' answers to a series of questions asking about the level of interest various groups in their college (e.g., faculty, administration, fellow students) expressed about these topics. As the table below illustrates, those who attended Catholic colleges are substantially more likely to report that various groups on their campus expressed "some" or "very much" interest in faith, religion, and prayer.

<b>Level of Interest Expressed in Faith, Religion, and Prayer by...</b> <i>Percentage in each category responding "some" or "very much" interest:</i>			
		Type of College Attended the Longest:	
	<b>All</b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
Campus Ministry	77%	70%	87%
Fellow Students	61	49	78
The College as a Whole	42	20	70
Faculty	39	16	69
Administration	33	10	62

- Among Catholic college attenders, 78 percent report that their fellow students expressed "some" or "very much" interest in faith, religion, and prayer, 69 percent that the faculty expressed such interest, and 62 percent that the college administration expressed such interest. Among non-Catholic college attenders, these percentages are only 49 percent, 16 percent, and 10 percent, respectively.
- The least dramatic difference between Catholic college attenders and non-Catholic college attenders is in the level of interest in faith, religion, and prayer they found among the campus ministry staff. Eighty-seven percent of those who attended Catholic colleges report that campus ministry expressed "some" or "very much" interest in these topics, compared to 70 percent of those who attended non-Catholic colleges.

### *Living Arrangements during College*

The majority of respondents report having lived in college dorms and/or with roommates during some or all of their college years. Slightly fewer, though still a majority, report having lived off campus, and the least common living arrangement is living at home.

<b>Living Arrangements during College</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
		<u>Type of College Attended the Longest:</u>	
	<b>All</b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
Lived in Campus Dorms	78%	74%	84%
Lived Off-Campus	59	66	54
Lived at Home	33	42	23
Lived with a Roommate (s)	78	77	83

As the table above reports:

- Those who attended a Catholic college for all or most of their college years are the most likely to have lived in campus dorms (84 percent) and/or to have lived with roommates during college (83 percent);
- Those who attended a non-Catholic college for all or most of their college years are the most likely to have lived off campus (66 percent) or at home (42 percent).

## *Summary*

As the findings presented in this part of the report demonstrate, respondents to the survey report significantly different college experiences based on whether they attended a Catholic college or a non-Catholic college. When compared to those who attended a non-Catholic college, those who attended a Catholic college were more likely to:

- be exposed to priests and religious sisters and brothers among the faculty, administration, and campus ministry staff of their college;
- participate in Mass, spiritual direction, retreats, service, devotional practices, and campus ministry programs during college;
- enjoy a college atmosphere in which they could discuss their faith, religion, and prayer openly in class and with professors and fellow students outside of class;
- be surrounded by professors, students, and administrators who express interest in faith, religion, and prayer.

Whether these dimensions of the college experience actually had an influence on the respondents' vocational discernment, however, remains to be seen, and the next section of this report attempts to answer that question. Specifically, in Part III of the report, CARA examines closely what respondents reported as the influence of these different dimensions of their college experience on their decision to pursue a vocation to diocesan priesthood or religious life.



### Part III: College Experiences Perceived to Influence Vocational Discernment

This part of the report analyzes what respondents said about the effects of their college activities and experiences on their own vocational discernment. Here, the respondents themselves assess the value of various college activities and experiences in fostering their own vocational discernment. In so doing, these results can help inform college administrators and vocation directors about best practices for encouraging vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

#### *Influence of College Personnel on Vocational Discernment*

As shown in Part II, one of the chief differences between those who attended Catholic colleges and those who attended non-Catholic colleges is their degree of exposure to priests, sisters, and brothers as their college professors, and to a slightly lesser extent, as members of their campus ministry staff. Compared to those who attended a non-Catholic college, those who attended a Catholic college are substantially more likely to have had a professor or campus minister who was a priest, sister, or brother. But what kind of influence did respondents claim this exposure had in terms of their vocational discernment?

Respondents who indicated that they had any professors or campus ministers during college who were priests, sisters, or brothers were asked to report whether “any of them had a significant positive influence on your vocational discernment.” Later in the questionnaire, respondents were also asked to indicate whether any campus ministry staff, professors, or college staff had either encouraged or discouraged their vocational discernment during college. The following table reports the responses of these questions and how they differ based on the respondents’ level of exposure to a Catholic college environment.

As the table illustrates:

- Sixty-four percent state that a priest/sister/brother *professor* had a “significant positive influence” on their vocational discernment, and 56 percent report that a priest/sister/brother *campus minister* had a “significant positive influence” on their vocational discernment.
- Substantially more of the respondents who attended a Catholic college report that a priest/sister/brother *professor* had a “significant positive influence” on their vocational discernment than respondents who attended a non-Catholic college (72 percent to 46 percent, respectively).
- The same cannot be said with respect to having a priest/sister/brother as a *campus minister*; when asked about this, responses from those who attended a Catholic college

are not substantially different than from those who attended a non-Catholic college (57 percent to 55 percent, respectively).

### Influence of College Personnel on Vocational Discernment

*Percentage in each category:*

	All	Type of College Attended the Longest:	
		Non-Catholic	Catholic
“Yes,” a priest/sister/brother professor had a “significant positive influence” on vocational discernment <sup>8</sup>	64%	46%	72%
“Yes,” a priest/sister/brother campus minister had a “significant positive influence” on vocational discernment	56	55	57
“Yes,” a campus minister <i>encouraged</i> vocational discernment	51	46	59
“Yes,” a campus minister <i>discouraged</i> vocational discernment	5	3	7
“Yes,” a professor <i>encouraged</i> vocational discernment	46	25	72
“Yes,” a professor <i>discouraged</i> vocational discernment	12	12	13
“Yes,” a college staff member <i>encouraged</i> vocational discernment	30	14	50
“Yes,” a college staff member <i>discouraged</i> vocational discernment	7	7	7

- Very few of the respondents report being discouraged in their vocational discernment by their campus ministers (5 percent), professors (12 percent), or college staff (7 percent), but substantially more of the Catholic college attenders report being encouraged by these individuals than non-Catholic college attenders.
- Of those who attended a Catholic college, 59 percent report being encouraged by a campus minister, 72 percent report being encouraged by a professor, and 50 percent report being encouraged by a college staff member. Similar figures for non-Catholic college attenders are substantially lower: 46 percent report being encouraged by a

<sup>8</sup> Percentages calculated based on the number of respondents who reported having a priest, sister, or brother in the role of either professor or campus minister.

campus minister, 25 percent report being encouraged by a professor, and 14 percent by a college staff member.

One of the open-ended questions asked those who reported being positively influenced by a professor who was a priest, sister, or brother to describe the positive influence that individual(s) had on their vocational discernment. The most frequent comments center on their being a positive example of priestly or religious life; their example of spirituality and faith-practice; their intellectual and academic contributions; their joy and pastoral care; and their active, positive promotion of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. (See Appendix III for a full transcription of the responses.) The responses below represent a sampling of comments on these themes.

*Father “X” modeled for me the type of man I wanted to become: keenly intelligent, funny, faithful, and filled with joy.*

*They presented the priesthood as a positive choice, and they seemed happy in their vocation.*

*They provided a model of priesthood that I could imagine myself in.*

*They provided a witness of a happy and holy life.*

Another open-ended question asked those who indicated being positively influenced by a campus minister who was a priest, sister, or brother to describe the positive influence that individual(s) had on their vocational discernment. The most frequent comments focus on their general example of priestly or religious life; their active, positive promotion of vocations to the priesthood and religious life; their guidance in spiritual direction; their celebration of the Sacraments; and their presence and availability. (See Appendix III for a full transcription of the responses.) The responses below represent a sampling of comments on these themes.

*The campus ministers were both holy and human. Seeing them made discerning a vocation much easier; it seemed possible both to be in ordained ministry and to love deeply, chastely.*

*Their regular presence on campus every day.*

*Sister provided spiritual direction and support.*

*The on-campus priest offered a weekly Mass that I was able to attend.*

### ***Influence of Masses and Homilies during College on Vocational Discernment***

As reported in Part II, respondents' level of exposure to a Catholic college environment is associated with their access to a Catholic chapel on campus, the availability of Mass on campus, and their frequency of Mass attendance during college. Compared to those who attended a non-Catholic college, those who attended a Catholic college had greater access to a Catholic chapel and daily Mass on campus, and higher frequency of their own Mass attendance during college. What influence did respondents attribute to these various factors on their own vocational discernment?

Those who reported attending Mass during college were asked to indicate the influence that attending Mass and listening to the homilies at Mass had on their vocational discernment. As the table below shows, respondents are over twice as likely to report that attending Mass during college had "very much" influence on their vocational discernment than to report that listening to homilies had "very much" influence. Whether this is a reflection of the quality of homilies relative to the Mass cannot be answered with these data, but the results suggest that the Mass in its entirety is perceived to be more influential than just one part of it, that is, the homilies.

<b>Influence of Masses and Homilies during College on Vocational Discernment</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
	<u>Type of College Attended the Longest:</u>		
	<b>All</b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
Vocational Discernment was Influenced "Very Much" by Attending Mass during College	52%	45%	61%
Vocational Discernment was Influenced "Very Much" by Homilies at Mass during College	19	16	24

The table above also reveals the following:

- Those who attended a Catholic college are substantially more likely than those who attended a non-Catholic college to report that their vocational discernment was "very much" influenced by Mass attendance (61 percent to 45 percent, respectively).

- Although lower numbers of respondents indicate that homilies at Mass had “very much” influence on their discernment (19 percent overall), those who attended a Catholic college are more likely than those who attended a non-Catholic college to report that the homilies had “very much” influence (24 percent to 16 percent, respectively).

### ***Influence of Spiritual Direction during College on Vocational Discernment***

As described in Part II, while 44 percent of all respondents met with a spiritual director regularly during college, those who attended a Catholic college were twice as likely as those who attended a non-Catholic college to have a spiritual director during college (62 percent to 29 percent). But what influence, if any, do respondents claim that meeting regularly with a spiritual director during college had on their vocational discernment?

Of those who report having a regular spiritual director during college, approximately two-thirds (65 percent) claim that spiritual direction influenced their vocational discernment “very much.” Twenty-nine percent report that it had “some” influence, and only a small percentage claimed that it had “no” (one percent) or “a little” (five percent) influence.

<b>Influence of Spiritual Direction during College on Vocational Discernment</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category among those who had a spiritual director:</i>			
	<u>Type of College Attended the Longest:</u>		
	<b>All</b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
Spiritual Direction had “some” influence on vocational discernment	29%	30%	28%
Spiritual Direction had “very much” influence on vocational discernment	65	62	67

As shown in the table above, these strong, positive valuations of the importance of spiritual direction do not vary based on the type of college the respondent attended. Those who attended Catholic colleges are equally likely as those who attended non-Catholic colleges to state that spiritual direction during college was influential in their vocational discernment.

### ***Influence of Retreats and Service Programs during College on Vocational Discernment***

As reported in Part II, two-thirds of respondents (67 percent) indicate that they participated in a religious retreat during college, and over two-thirds (70 percent) state that they participated in service projects during college. Compared to those who attended a non-Catholic college, those who attended a Catholic college are approximately 20 percent more likely to report having participated in a religious retreat during college, and 15 percent more likely to report having participated in a service program. But what kind of influence did respondents claim these experiences had in terms of their vocational discernment?

<b>Influence of Retreats and Service Programs during College on Vocational Discernment</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
		<u>Type of College Attended the Longest:</u>	
	<b>All</b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
Retreat experiences had “some” influence on discernment	40%	37%	43%
Retreat experiences had “very much” influence on discernment	36	38	34
Service programs had “some” influence on discernment	35	36	34
Service programs had “very much” influence on discernment	25	23	27

As the table above illustrates, of those who report having participated in these activities during college:

- Over three-quarters, claim that religious retreats during college influenced their vocational discernment “some” (40 percent) or “very much” (36 percent), and three out of five (60 percent) report that participating in a service program during college influenced their vocational discernment “some” (34 percent) or “very much” (27 percent).
- Similar to the findings with respect to the influence of spiritual direction, responses do not differ between those who attended a Catholic college and those who attended a non-Catholic college.

- Respondents are also more likely to report that retreats and service programs had “some” influence on their discernment than they are to report these activities had “very much” influence – regardless of whether or not they attended a Catholic college.



### ***Influence of Devotional Practices during College on Vocational Discernment***

As described in Part II, respondents' level of exposure to a Catholic college environment is associated with the range and frequency of their devotional practices during college. Catholic college attenders not only participate in a wider variety of devotional practices during college, they also engage in them more frequently than those who attended a non-Catholic college. This is true for every form of devotion except Bible study, where non-Catholic college attenders report slightly higher engagement than their counterparts. But what influence, if any, do respondents claim that these devotional practices during college had on their vocational discernment?

<b>Devotional Practices during College Having “Very Much” Influence on Vocational Discernment</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category :</i>			
		<u>Type of College Attended the Longest:</u>	
	<b>All</b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
Other Group Prayer	58%	49%	66%
Holy Hour	56	53	59
Other Individual Prayer	54	52	56
Eucharistic Adoration	53	51	54
Liturgy of the Hours	37	31	44
Rosary	32	31	34
Lectio Divina	27	25	29
Bible Study	23	21	26

As the table above illustrates:

- Those who participated in “other group prayer” rate it as one of the most influential devotions for their vocational discernment during college, with 58 percent of those who engaged in this practice reporting that it had “very much” influence on their vocational discernment.
- Other similarly influential devotions were Holy Hour devotion, “other individual prayer,” and Eucharistic Adoration, for which over half of respondents who engaged in these practices during colleges stating that they were very influential on their vocational discernment.

- For every type of devotional practice, respondents who attended a Catholic college are more likely than those who attended a non-Catholic college to state that participating in the devotion during college had “very much” influence on their vocational discernment.

### ***Influence of College Roommates and Friends on Vocational Discernment***

Part II showed that those who attended a Catholic college are the more likely to have lived in campus dorms (84 percent) and/or to have lived with roommates during college (83 percent). Those who attended a non-Catholic college, on the other hand, are more likely to have lived off campus (66 percent) or at home (42 percent). What influence, if any, do respondents claim that college roommates and friends had on their vocational discernment?

<b>Influence of College Roommates and Friends on Vocational Discernment</b>			
<i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
		<u>Type of College Attended the Longest:</u>	
	<b>All</b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
Roommate at college had “very much” influence on discernment	10%	6%	15%
Close friends at college had “very much” influence on discernment	28	22	37
College friends were “very” supportive of vocational choice	56	46	69
“Yes,” friends <i>encouraged</i> vocational discernment during college	72	63	84
“Yes,” friends <i>discouraged</i> vocational discernment during college	26	26	27

As the table above illustrates:

- Only 10 percent of the respondents report that their roommate had “very much” influence on their vocational discernment, and Catholic college attenders are more likely than non-Catholic college attenders to report being influenced to this extent by roommates (15 percent to 6 percent, respectively).
- Over a quarter (28 percent) of respondents report that their close friends had “very much” influence on their discernment, and Catholic college attenders are more likely than non-Catholic college attenders to report being influenced to this extent by their close friends (37 percent to 22 percent, respectively).
- Over half of respondents (56 percent overall) report that their college friends were “very” supportive of their vocational choice. Catholic college attenders are more likely than

non-Catholic college attenders to report this level of support from their college friends (69 percent to 46 percent, respectively).

- Respondents do not assign the same high level of influence (i.e., “very much” influence) to their college friends (28 percent claiming that their close friends had “very much” influence) or their roommates (10 percent) as they do to having a priest, sister, or brother as a professor (64 percent) or campus minister (56 percent).

A central finding of the table above is the fact that those who attended a Catholic college are substantially more likely than those who attended a non-Catholic college to report being influenced and supported by their roommates and friends in their vocation discernment and choice. Compared to those who attended non-Catholic colleges, those who attended Catholic colleges are ten percent more likely to report that their roommates had “very much” influence on their discernment, over 15 percent more likely to report that their close friends at college had “very much” influence on their discernment, and almost 25 percent more likely to report that their college friends were “very” supportive of their vocational choice.

The importance of peers in fostering and sustaining priestly and religious vocations should not be underestimated. Sociologists in general, and sociologists of religion in particular, have long recognized the importance of friendship networks in sustaining belief and practice. Noted sociologist of religion Peter Berger (1967), for instance, spoke of the importance of peer friendship networks in terms of providing what he called “plausibility structures.” “Plausibility structures,” according to Berger, are those networks of like-minded others who, through our participation with them, help to sustain our belief and commitment to things which might in other settings seem implausible to believe.

### ***Influence of Particular College Courses on Vocational Discernment***

As described in Part II, one of the primary differences between those who attended Catholic colleges and those who attended non-Catholic colleges is the degree to which they felt free to discuss faith, religion, and prayer in their college environment. Respondents who attended Catholic colleges are almost five times more likely (51 percent compared to 11 percent of those who attended non-Catholic colleges) to report discussing faith, religion, and prayer “frequently” during class. They are also substantially more likely than those who attended non-Catholic colleges to report that their college’s faculty, staff, campus ministers, administrators, and students expressed interest in the topics of faith, religion, and prayer.

To better understand the role of college courses on our respondents’ vocational discernment, the survey asked respondents: “In your experience, were any of the courses you took in college *especially* influential on your vocational discernment?”

<b>Influence of Particular College Courses on Vocational Discernment</b>			
<i>Percentage reporting “Yes” in each category:</i>			
	<u>Type of College Attended the Longest:</u>		
	<b>All</b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
“Yes,” college course(s) were “especially influential” on vocational discernment	40%	27%	58%

As the table above reports:

- Forty percent of respondents overall state “yes,” that a college course was especially influential on their vocational discernment.
- Those who attended a Catholic college are over twice as likely as those who attended a non-Catholic college to be so influenced by a college course. While 58 percent of those who attended a Catholic college report having been especially influenced by a college course, only 27 percent of those who attended a non-Catholic college report likewise.

Of those who indicated that one or more of their college courses was “especially influential” on their vocational discernment, respondents were then asked to identify the course name and corresponding academic department for up to three courses. While the course names are widely varied, the most frequently mentioned academic departments were theology,

philosophy, and religious studies. A significant number of respondents also identified classes in history, the social sciences, the life sciences, the humanities (including art, music, literature, classics, and language), and business.

### ***Influence of College Campus Ministry on Vocational Discernment***

As Part II reported, nearly two-thirds of respondents (64 percent) report that they participated in campus ministry during college, half (49 percent) report that they were engaged in service activities through campus ministry, and almost a third (29 percent) state that they were part of the campus ministry leadership team at their college. Although those who attended a Catholic college were more likely than those who attended a non-Catholic college to have participated in any campus ministry activities during college, the frequency of involvement does not vary across these contexts. But what influence, if any, did respondents' participation in campus ministry programs during college have on their vocational discernment?

To answer this question, respondents were asked to report how influential campus ministry programs were on their own vocational discernment. Overall, 23 percent of all respondents state that campus ministry had “very much” influence on their vocational discernment. There is little variation in responses between those who attended a Catholic college and those who attended a non-Catholic college. In both contexts, campus ministry programs reportedly have “very much” influence on vocational discernment for approximately a quarter of respondents.

#### **College Campus Ministry Having “Very Much” Influence on Vocational Discernment** *Percentage in each category:*

	<b>All</b>	<b>Type of College Attended the Longest:</b>	
		<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
Campus Ministry had “very much” influence on discernment	23%	22%	25%

### ***Influence of Vocational Discernment Programs on Vocational Discernment***

Participation in various vocational discernment programs (e.g., “Come & See” weekends, Vocation Support Groups, and Project Andrew) would be expected to have an influence on an individual’s vocational discernment, and respondents who said that they had participated in these kinds of programs were asked to indicate the level of influence that each had on his own vocational discernment. As the table below illustrates, of those who reported involvement in these programs, between 40 and 52 percent state that their experience with one of these programs “very much” influenced their vocational discernment. One in five reports that Project Andrew influenced their vocational discernment as much.

<b>Vocational Discernment Programs during College Having “Very Much” Influence</b> <i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
		<u>Type of College Attended the Longest:</u>	
	<b>All</b>	<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
“Come & See”	52%	53%	51%
Vocations Event	42	44	39
Vocation Support Group	40	40	39
Project Andrew	20	22	18

There is little variation in responses between those who attended a Catholic college and those who attended a non-Catholic college. The level of influence which these types of vocational discernment programs are reported to have does not depend on whether or not the respondent attended a Catholic college. Across college contexts, these types of vocational discernment programs appear to have similar influence.

### ***Influence of Any Off-Campus Catholic Parishes on Vocational Discernment***

Respondents were also asked: “During your college years was an off-campus Catholic parish a significant factor in your vocational discernment?” As the table below reports, 39 percent of all respondents claim that an off-campus Catholic parish played a significant role in their vocational discernment.

#### **Influence of An Off-Campus Parish during College on Vocational Discernment**

*Percentage in each category:*

	<b>All</b>	<u>Type of College Attended the Longest:</u>	
		<b>Non-Catholic</b>	<b>Catholic</b>
“Yes,” an off-campus parish was “a significant factor in vocational discernment”	39%	46%	31%
Parish participation had “very much” importance on discernment	30	33	27

Those who attended a non-Catholic college are slightly more likely than those who attended a Catholic college to state that an off-campus parish was a significant factor in their vocational discernment (46 percent to 31 percent, respectively). For such students, a Catholic chapel or campus ministry program may not have been available to them on campus, so they are more likely to identify an off-campus parish as a source of support and inspiration in their vocational discernment.

Of those who indicated that an off-campus Catholic parish was a significant factor in their vocational discernment, respondents were asked to identify in what ways this parish had been significant. The most frequent comments centered on the influence of the parish priest, their participation in Mass, the opportunity for ministry experience, the support of the parish community, and the opportunity to engage in parish organizations. A significant number indicated that the off-campus parish was their home parish and, very often, the parish in which they had grown up. The responses below represent a sampling of comments on these themes.

*I was actively involved in ministry and other types of service.*

*The parish was welcoming and supportive of me.*

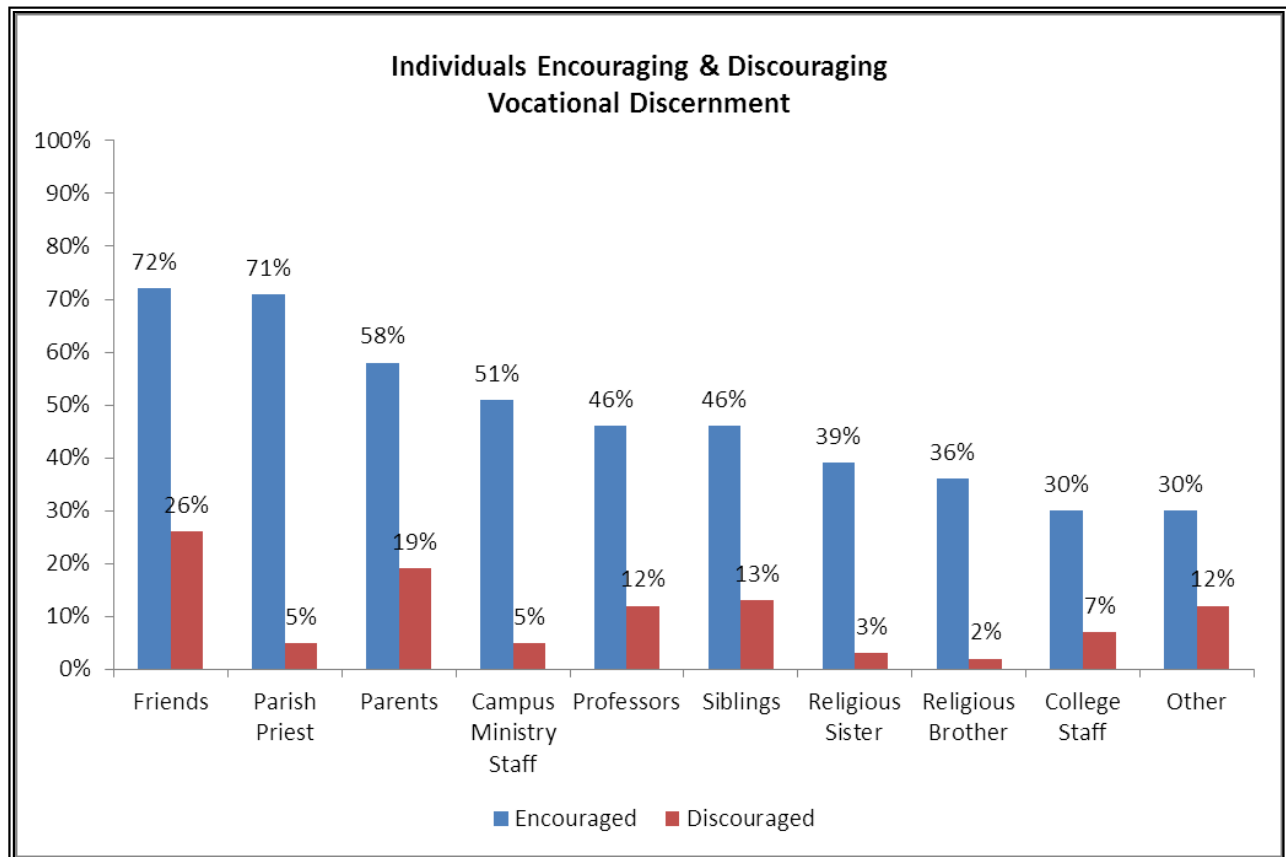
*My hometown parish provided many opportunities for Mass and prayer, as well as supportive priests and parishioners.*

*The priestly ministry of my pastor was a great influence on my vocation.*



### ***Comparing the Relative Influence of Various People on Vocational Discernment***

As noted earlier, many individuals have an influence on the vocational discernment of men considering priesthood or religious life during college. The figure below reports the results of a series of questions in which respondents were asked to report whether any of the individuals listed (campus ministry staff, professors, parish priests, etc.) had encouraged or discouraged them in their vocational discernment during college.



As the figure illustrates:

- Respondents were most likely to report having been encouraged in their vocational discernment by friends (72 percent), parish priests (71 percent), parents (58 percent), and campus ministry staff (51 percent).
- Friends and family are also identified as individuals who discouraged these men in their vocational discernment. Twenty-six percent of respondents state that friends discouraged

their vocational discernment during college, 19 percent claim that parents discouraged them, and 13 percent stated that siblings discouraged them.

Comparing the percentage of respondents who claim being encouraged or discouraged by these individuals across different educational contexts – i.e., Catholic or non-Catholic colleges – shows some interesting contrasts.

<b>Individuals Encouraging and Discouraging Vocational Discernment</b> <i>Percentage in each category:</i>			
	<u>Type of College Attended the Longest:</u>		
	All	Non-Catholic	Catholic
<b>ENCOURAGEMENT</b>			
Friends	72%	63%	84%
Parish Priest	71	69	74
Parents	58	49	69
Campus Ministry Staff	51	46	59
Professors	46	25	72
Siblings	46	39	55
Religious Sister	39	31	49
Religious Brother	36	25	50
College Staff	30	14	50
Other	30	27	36
<b>DISCOURAGEMENT</b>			
Friends	26%	26%	27%
Parents	19	20	19
Siblings	13	11	14
Professors	12	12	13
Other	12	12	11
College Staff	7	7	7
Campus Ministry Staff	5	3	7
Parish Priest	5	5	5
Religious Sister	3	2	4
Religious Brother	2	2	2

Compared to those who attended a non-Catholic college, those who attended a Catholic college are:

- over three times more likely (14 percent to 50 percent, respectively) to report being encouraged in their vocational discernment by college staff;
- almost three times more likely (25 percent to 72 percent, respectively) to be encouraged by a college professor;
- twice as likely to be encouraged by a religious sister or brother;
- and substantially more likely to be encouraged parents, siblings, friends, parish priests, and campus ministers.

On the other hand, the percentage of respondents who report being discouraged in their vocational discernment from any of these individuals does not vary across these contexts. No matter which type of college the respondents attended, they report similarly low levels of discouragement from these various individuals.

### ***Comparing the Relative Influence of Various Experiences on Vocational Discernment***

Throughout this part of the report, each section highlighted those activities and experiences during college which respondents claim as having “very much” influence on their vocational discernment. Because most of the questions on the questionnaire asking respondents to indicate the level of influence that various activities and experiences had on their vocational discernment used similar question wording and identical response categories (i.e., they were asked to describe their influence as either being “none at all,” “a little,” “some,” or “very much”), CARA is able to rank, from highest to lowest, those activities and experiences in terms of their levels of reported influence. In the table below, we present the percentage of respondents reporting “very much influence” for each item.

<b>Ranking of College Activities and Experiences by Level of Influence on Vocational Discernment</b>			
<i>Percent reporting “very much” influence:</i>			
	<b>All</b>		<b>All</b>
Spiritual Direction	65%	Rosary	32%
Other Group Prayer	57	Parish Participation	30
Holy Hour	56	Friends	28
Other Individual			
Prayer/Meditation	54	Lectio Divina	27
Eucharistic Adoration	53	Service Programs	25
Mass	52	Bible Study	23
“Come & See” Events	52	Campus Ministry	23
Vocations Events	42	Project Andrew	20
Vocation Support Group	39	Homilies at Mass	19
Liturgy of the Hours	37	Roommate(s)	10
		Residential Life/ Social	
Retreat Experiences	36	Activities	9

As the table illustrates:

- Respondents identify regular spiritual direction during college as the leading influence on their vocational discernment. Two-thirds (65 percent) of respondents report that spiritual direction had “very much influence.” This is higher than the percentage who responded in the highest category with respect to every other college activity or experience asked about on the survey. Clearly, having a regular spiritual director during college matters to

these respondents, and it matters more than practically anything else they were asked about.

- Following spiritual direction, in the order of reported influence, are a variety of prayer and devotional practices, including other group prayer (with 57 percent reporting that it had “very much” influence on their vocational discernment), Holy Hour devotion (with 56 percent), other individual prayer/meditation (54 percent), Eucharistic Adoration (53 percent), and the Mass (52 percent). Three of these five practices – Holy Hour, Eucharistic Adoration, and the Mass – are centered on the Eucharist.
- Following these prayer and devotional practices, in the order of reported influence are a variety of vocation awareness and support programs, including “Come & See” events (with 52 percent reporting that it had “very much” influence on their vocational discernment), vocations events (with 42 percent), and vocation support groups (39 percent).
- Following these vocation awareness and support programs, in the order of reported influence, are Liturgy of the Hours, retreat experiences, praying the rosary, participating in a parish, and having supportive friends.

### ***Factors that Motivated and Discouraged Respondents to Pursue a Religious Vocation***

An open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire asked respondents to identify what kept them motivated in pursuing a vocation to the priesthood and/or religious life during college. The most frequent comments center on their personal prayer life, the example of a priest and/or religious, a sense of being called by God, a desire to serve God, the encouragement of friends, and their participation in the Mass. Some respondents, however, used their response to this question to indicate that they had not yet begun discerning a vocation during their time as an undergraduate, and consequently they could not identify factors in college that motivated them. The responses below represent a sampling of comments on these themes.

*Ultimately, the feeling in my heart that the priesthood was where I was to go. It kept resurfacing and I came to a point where I could not ignore it.*

*Good priests and nuns that lived out their vocation with joy and loyalty to the faith and the church.*

*Prayer, especially the Mass.*

*My prayer life and the support of those who know me well.*

*I was confident this was what God was calling me to do.*

*The desire to serve others and bring Christ's love to them.*

Similarly, another open-ended question at the conclusion of the survey asked respondents to identify what discouraged them from pursuing a vocation to the priesthood and/or religious life during college. The most frequent comments focused on the culture and environment of their college campus, other career ambitions or plans, women and dating, the requirement of celibacy, lack of support from family and friends, and the poor example of some priests, religious, and/or seminarians. As with the preceding question, some respondents indicate that they were not yet discerning a vocation during their time as an undergraduate, so they report that the question does not apply to them. Some respondents also identify issues facing the Church, including the clergy sex abuse scandal, as having discouraged their vocational discernment. The responses below represent a sampling of comments on these themes.

*Giving up marriage and giving up other career opportunities that might not be possible as a religious.*

*The reality, politics, and flaws of the Church. Seeing how the faith was lost by so many.*

*Celibacy and the sacrifice of having children.*

*Nothing in particular; I just wasn't thinking about it.*

*The reaction of my family to my decision to enter seminary. They were very upset with me and tried many times to change my mind.*

## ***Summary and Implications of the Findings***

As the findings presented in this part of the report demonstrate, respondents report that a variety of activities and experiences during their college years were influential in their vocational discernment. One of the most influential aspects of their college experience on their vocational discernment, according to the respondents, was participating regularly in spiritual direction. Other aspects of their college experience which respondents identify as influential on their vocational discernment were a variety of prayer and devotional practices, including other group prayer, Holy Hour devotion, other individual prayer/meditation, Eucharistic Adoration, and the Mass. The fact that three out of these five practices – i.e., the Holy Hour, Eucharistic Adoration, and the Mass – are centered on the Eucharist, speaks of the importance that respondents assign to the Eucharist in their own vocational discernment. Respondents also rate a variety of vocation awareness and support programs, including “Come & See” events, as being influential in their vocational discernment.

The analyses presented in Part II reveal that many of these factors which respondents report as being influential in their vocational discernment are more available, more easily accessible, or more frequently practiced in Catholic colleges than in non-Catholic colleges. Compared to those who attended non-Catholic colleges, those who attended Catholic colleges are more likely to have a priest or religious as a professor, campus minister, or college administrator, to participate more frequently in spiritual direction, Mass, certain religious devotions, retreats, and service programs during college, and to report that the staff at their college expressed interest in faith, religion, and prayer. They are also more likely to report being encouraged in their vocational discernment by friends, professors, and campus ministry staff.

Those who attended non-Catholic colleges, on the other hand, match or exceed those who attended Catholic colleges in their participation in Bible studies, individual and group prayer, retreats of longer duration, and campus ministry leadership teams. When asked about the influence of various experiences on their vocational discernment, they are also as likely as those who attended Catholic colleges to assign “very much” influence to meeting regularly with a spiritual director during college, having a priest, sister, or brother who served as a *campus minister*, and participating in retreat experiences, campus ministry, and vocational discernment programs. They are also more likely than their counterparts to identify off-campus parishes as being highly influential.

The differences observed between those who attended a Catholic college and those who attended a non-Catholic college suggest that although Catholic college attenders are more likely to be exposed to, and participate in, a wider array of activities and experiences which they report fostered their vocational discernment, non-Catholic college attenders found support in discerning their vocation through participating actively in spiritual direction, campus ministry programs, retreats, vocational discernment programs, and off-campus parishes during college.

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