

Vocations Study Group Report

Study Group Members:

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- Sr. Deborah Borneman, SS.C.M. (National Religious Vocation Conference)
- Ernie Garrido (Vocations Office, DC)
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- Fr. Ed Nowak (Vocations Office, DC)
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Introduction

All Paulists, and various lay partners, are responsible for vocations promotion, invitation, and accompaniment, working in tandem with the Paulist Vocations Team. Trusting the Holy Spirit and working together, we can amplify our vocations efforts, share our Paulist charism, and respond to the "signs of the times" in the U.S. Catholic Church. Our priority is both to sustain long-term vocations efforts and set realistic expectations for vocational growth while maintaining creativity and optimism amid sociological shifts. We look forward to the next steps of this ongoing conversation!

National Landscape

National data on vocations is taken from the following report: *The Class of 2026: Survey of Ordinands to the Priesthood* from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (April 2026).

On average, responding ordinands in religious institutes first considered priesthood when they were **18 years old**. Responding ordinands in religious institutes were scheduled for ordination, on average, at the **age of 37**.

Ordinands in religious institutes knew the members of their religious institute for 5 years, on average, before entering the seminary.

64% of ordinands in religious institutes and dioceses reported having full-time work experience prior to entering the seminary [highest percentages for ordinands in religious institutes in education (33%), church ministry/parish life (18%), and business (18%)].

For ordinands in religious institutes, in regard to participation in parish ministries before entering the seminary:

- 72% served as altar servers.
- 52% served as lectors.
- 35% served as EMHC.
- 32% served as cantors/in music ministry.
- 42% served as catechists.
- 40% served in Campus/Youth ministry.



92% of ordinands in religious institutes and dioceses reported being encouraged to consider the priesthood by someone in their life:

- 49% of ordinands in religious institutes by their parish priest
- 42% of ordinands in religious institutes by a friend
- 47% of ordinands in religious institutes by their mother
- 42% of ordinands in religious institutes by their father
- 36% of ordinands in religious institutes by a parishioner
- 25% of ordinands in religious institutes by a campus minister/school chaplain

Paulist Realities

In the past 10 years, 14 men have been ordained Paulist priests.

Average age at time of ordination: **38**

- 2 ordained in their late 20s
- 3 ordained in their early 30s
- 5 ordained in their late 30s
- 2 ordained in their early 40s
- 2 ordained in their early 50s

Paulist Vocations Team Activities

Come & See Discernment Retreats

Upcoming:

- July 24-26, 2026 – Church of St. Paul the Apostle, NYC
- Fall 2026 – Hecker House, Washington, DC
- February 2027 – West Coast

Conferences

- SEEK (Fellowship of Catholic University Students), Los Angeles Religious Education Congress, and Catholic Volunteer Network

Events

- Catholic University of America Celebration of Consecrated Life vocations fair
- Catholic University of America Eat, Pray & Walk vocations fair
- Franciscan University of Steubenville (OH) Religious Vocations Fair
- University of Mary Vocations Jamboree (Bismarck, ND)



Vocations Director Foundation Visits

- Grand Rapids, Boston
- Visits with Preaching: Knoxville, UCLA, Horseshoe Bay, San Diego
- Discernment Talks to Young Adult Groups: Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Austin
- Br. Rob Clark vocations tour for discerners in NYC

Weekly Discernment Group

- 7:30-8:30pm Eastern, Sundays, Zoom
- Facilitated by a different Paulist or lay partner each week
- Reflecting on the Sunday Gospel and talking about Paulist life and mission

Digital Outreach

- “Call of the Spirit” e-newsletter for discerners from Vocations Director
- Ongoing curation of content on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok under handle @paulistvocation
- Weekly posts of clips of Paulist homilies with messages relevant to vocations ministry
- Weekly videos from recently ordained Paulists offering window into Paulist ministry, community life, and spiritual life

Advertising

- Social media advertising, including YouTube, Google Ads, Facebook, and Instagram
- Digital advertising, including [religiousministries.com](https://www.religiousministries.com), [uscatholic.org](https://www.uscatholic.org), [vocationnetwork.org](https://www.vocationnetwork.org), [aleteia.org](https://www.aleteia.org), and various diocesan websites near Paulist Foundations
- Print advertising, including Bayard publications and diocesan newspapers near Paulist Foundations

Paulist Vocations Resources

- Document: Best practices for promoting vocations (written by Ed Nowak, CSP) -
 - <https://tinyurl.com/VocationsPractices>
- Document: Paulist Vocations giveaways inventory (includes Paulist swag, prayer cards, brochures, etc.) -
 - <https://tinyurl.com/PaulistGiveaways>
- Helpful websites:
 - Vocations toolkit- <https://www.beapaulist.org/toolkit>
 - Information for parents & families - <https://www.beapaulist.org/for-families>
 - Newsletters & articles - <https://www.beapaulist.org/blog>
 - Vocation stories of the Paulists - <https://tinyurl.com/YouTubeVocations>
- Social media: TikTok videos - <https://www.tiktok.com/@paulistvocation>
- Social media: YouTube Shorts - <https://www.youtube.com/@PaulistFathers1858/shorts>
- Social media: Twitch - <https://www.twitch.tv/frevancsp>
- Isaac Hecker digital comic book - <https://tinyurl.com/HeckerComicBook>

The Paulist Fathers are a member of the National Religious Vocation Conference, which offers a variety of resources on its website (www.nrvcc.net). Some may require a login to access, but many others are accessible for all.

Considerations

1. The 2022 General Assembly discerned the need for a Community-wide effort to promote vocations in the wake of the success of the Hope for the Future Capital Campaign. We feel this good will, energy, and momentum for our Paulist community still exists and suggest a vocations *initiative*, fleshing out *strategies* for this moment in our history.
 - a. Consider establishing a Community-wide vocations task force of interested Paulists and lay partners (Vocations Team and others) that meets regularly after the Assembly to galvanize these efforts.
2. Dream, including attention on how the Vocations Office might amplify and expand its ministry (personnel and around "vocation" broadly) with deeper investment (financial and through partnerships).
 - a. Prioritize collaboration and connection with Paulist Associates, Deacon Affiliates, (arch)diocesan vocation offices, and other religious communities.
3. Empower local Foundations with resources that best engage and reflect their respective realities alongside ongoing visits from the Vocations Team.
 - a. Help Foundations to establish local vocation committees where feasible.
 - b. Use resources of individual Foundations (e.g., homilies, communication channels, hosting talks on discernment/vocations, etc.) to broaden and strengthen reach as well as promote awareness of Paulist identity/mission/history and Servant of God Fr. Isaac Hecker.
 - c. Set goals for numbers of personal invitations from each Foundation to men to consider the Paulists, and review foundation efforts annually.
4. Amplify our footprint in digital spaces, part of our mission territory, so we are meeting seekers where they already are.
5. Expand pathways for two-way discernment (inquirer and Community discernment of each other/how we get to know each other before the invitation to apply).
 - a. Ex. Establish connections with Paulist Foundations for visits and/or spiritual conversations with discerners; host regional Come & See discernment retreats; explore informal postulancy options; etc.
 - b. Be mindful of different discernment structures that may be needed for college-age discerners, post-college discerners, and older discerners.
6. Establish a task force to revise and update admissions criteria, policies, and process.
 - a. Study sociological trends among older Millennials and Generation Z (e.g., educational debt, making commitments, mental health, social media use, etc.) that bear on the health, character, maturity, and skills required for formation.
 - b. Explore what attracts, influences, and sustains discerners (e.g. prayer habits and devotional practices).
 - c. Consult the *National Religious Vocation Conference Code of Ethics* as a resource.