

# Human Development Magazine

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### “Challenges for Vocation Ministers in an Age of Diversity: New Strategies for New Demographics”

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# Main Source of the Presentation

► ***New Generations of Catholic Sisters:  
The Challenge of Diversity***

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# 1. Religious Life in the U.S.: Toward a New Demographic Definition

- Decline in the total number of women religious from 1965 to 2013: 179,954 to 51,247

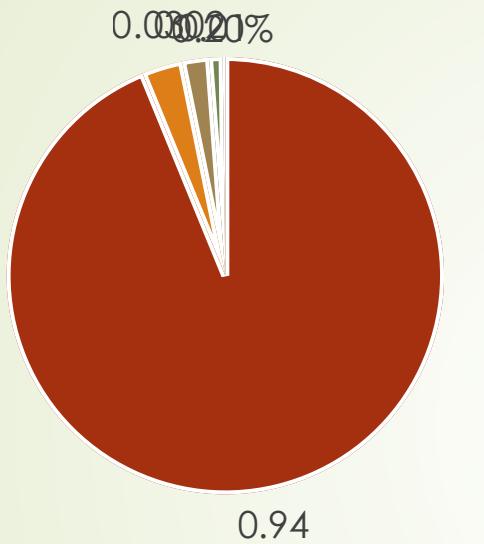
Given the advanced age of many religious today, the decline will continue for some time

- The ethnic composition of the youngest generation of women religious resembles the youngest generation in the Church

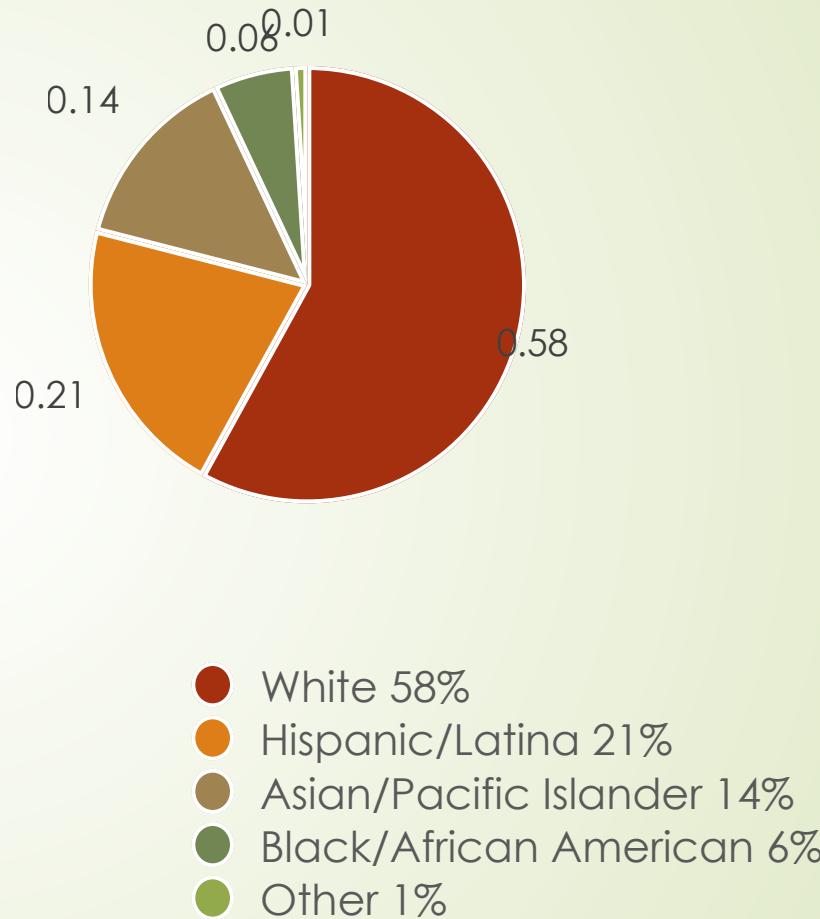
**Will a more multicultural and multiracial generation bring new growth?**

# Figure 1.5 Race/Ethnicity of Women Religious

Women Religious in Perpetual Vows  
2009



Women in Initial Formation 2009



Johnson, Mary, Patricia Wittberg, and Mary Gautier. New Generations of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity. New York: Oxford University Press (2014): p. 21 (source: 2009 NRVC/CARA Study of Recent Vocations to Religious Life).

# 1. A New Demographic Definition (cont.)

## ► Possible Reasons Given for the Decline in Numbers

1. Changes in society: a general crisis in faith; wider professional opportunities for women; individualism
2. A failure to invite candidates from among immigrants
3. Reduced probability of young women coming in direct contact with sisters in ministry
4. Structural changes in religious institutes
5. Lack of distinctive identity
6. Gap between generations of sisters

## 2. Navigating the Contemporary Religious Landscape

- Many new forms of social commitment provide a variety of religious choices
  1. Consecrated life
  2. Secular institutes
  3. Associations of the faithful
  4. New ecclesial movements
  5. Non-canonical and emerging communities

## 2. Navigating the Landscape (cont.)

- **Tension exists between new forms and the need of the Church to monitor and codify development**
  1. Previously clear distinctions merge and blur
  2. The real work for religious institutes is to define and articulate their identity
  3. If religious institutes do not do this themselves others will do it for them – others will sometimes be vague about the mission, purpose, and identity of the religious, or misrepresent them
  4. Lack of definition leads to lack of understanding

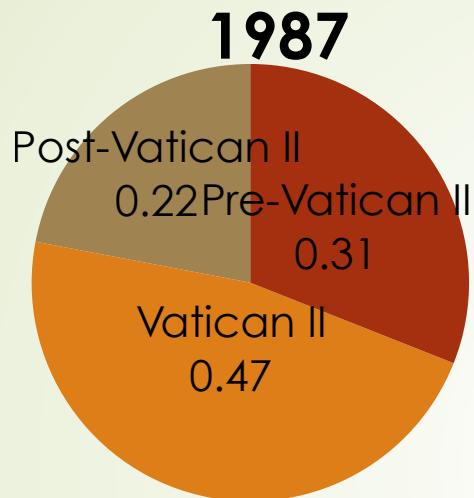
### 3. Priest and Prophet: Tensions in the Theories and Practices of Religious Life

- **Differences in language, tone, and emphasis contribute to tensions between Vatican officials and religious institutes of women**
  1. Varied interpretations of Church documents such as *Perfectae Caritatis* and *Vita Consecrata* have resulted in disagreements
  2. Vatican interventions, especially in the U.S., have added to the misunderstandings
  3. Conceptual ambiguity about terms such as charism, mission, vows, and vision have created further tensions

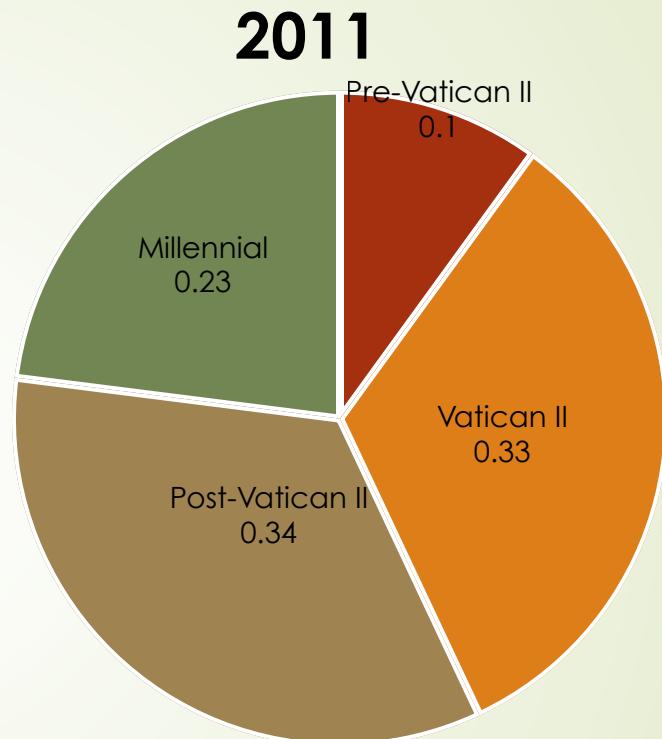
## 4. Generations and Their Cultures: Challenges and Possibilities

- ▶ **Generational differences are evident in the beliefs and practices of most young Catholics who are entering religious life and those of older religious**
- ▶ The differences are apparent in community living, communal prayer, and ministry settings
- 1. The challenge for older members is to be willing to adapt to the desires of the post-Vatican II, millennial, and subsequent generations
- 2. An institute will not attract new members if they are isolated from the changing culture

## Figure 4.2 Generations of Catholics in the United States



● Pre-Vatican II  
● Vatican II  
● Post-Vatican II



● Pre-Vatican II  
● Vatican II  
● Post-Vatican II  
● Millennial

Johnson, Mary, Patricia Wittberg, and Mary Gautier. New Generations of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity. New York: Oxford University Press (2014): p. 66 (source: D'Antonio, Dillon, and Gautier 2013, 50).

## Strength of Catholic Identity by Generation, 2005

	<u>Level of Identity %</u>			<u>Generational %</u>	
	Low %	Medium %	High %	1987	2005
<b>Total Catholics</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Pre-Vatican II</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Vatican II</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Post-Vatican II</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Millennials</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>

Adapted from: *American Catholics Today*, D'Antonio, Davidson, Hoge, Gautier, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007. (Top chart pp. 11 and 21; text pp. 18-19)

## 4. Generations and Their Cultures (cont.)

### ► Complications related to attracting and adapting to new members of different generations:

1. If only an estimated 10-15% of millennial Catholics are strongly committed to the Church, is the pool of potential candidates too small to change the numbers entering religious life?
2. What kinds of adaptations apparently desired by younger generations might be possible or desirable for existing communities to make?
3. Are some younger women not considering a vocation because of what they perceive as constraints of traditional religious life?

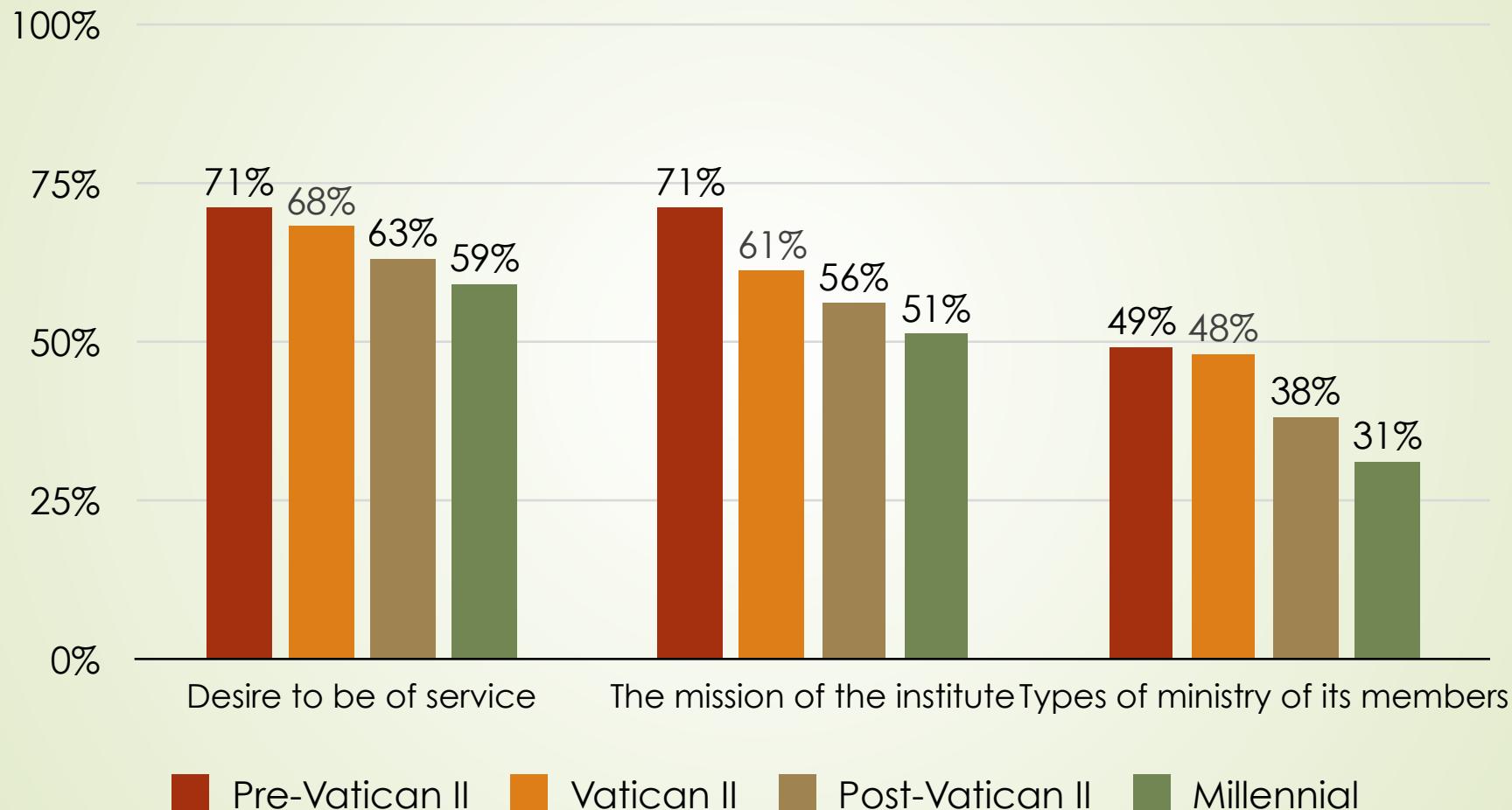
**Table 4.1 Age Distribution: Initial Formation**  
 (percentage in each category)

	All Women	LCWR	CMSWR
<b>Under 20</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>&lt;1%</b>
<b>20-29</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>30-39</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>40-49</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>50-59</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>60 and over</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>

Johnson, Mary, Patricia Wittberg, and Mary Gautier. New Generations of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity. New York: Oxford University Press (2014): p. 77 (source: 2009 NRVC/CARA Study of Recent Vocations to Religious Life).

# Figure 4.7 How much did these attract you to religious life/influence your decision?

(percentage responding “Very Much”)



Johnson, Mary, Patricia Wittberg, and Mary Gautier. New Generations of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity. New York: Oxford University Press (2014): p. 72.

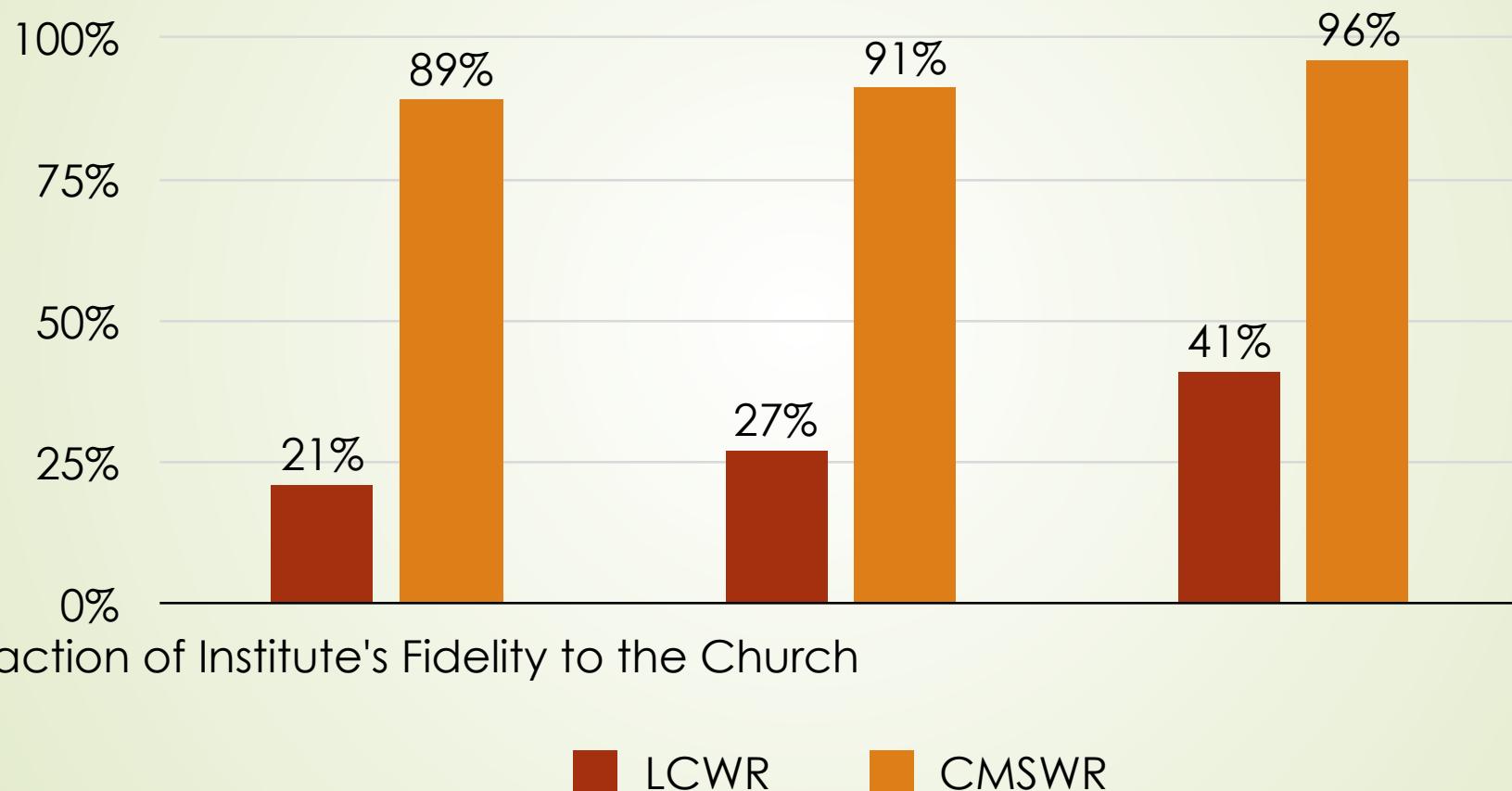
## 5. Identity: Distinguishing Elements

► **Various religious institutes favor distinct identities that are appealing to different generational cohorts; they take into consideration their distinguishing factors in adding new members**

1. Some have built an identity around, for example, social justice that predominates among the current members
2. Some have built an identity around, for example, attraction of wearing a habit, and perceived greater fidelity to the Church and its teachings

# Figure 5.4 Influences on Decision to Enter and Evaluation of Religious Institute

(percentage responding “Very Much” or “Excellent”)

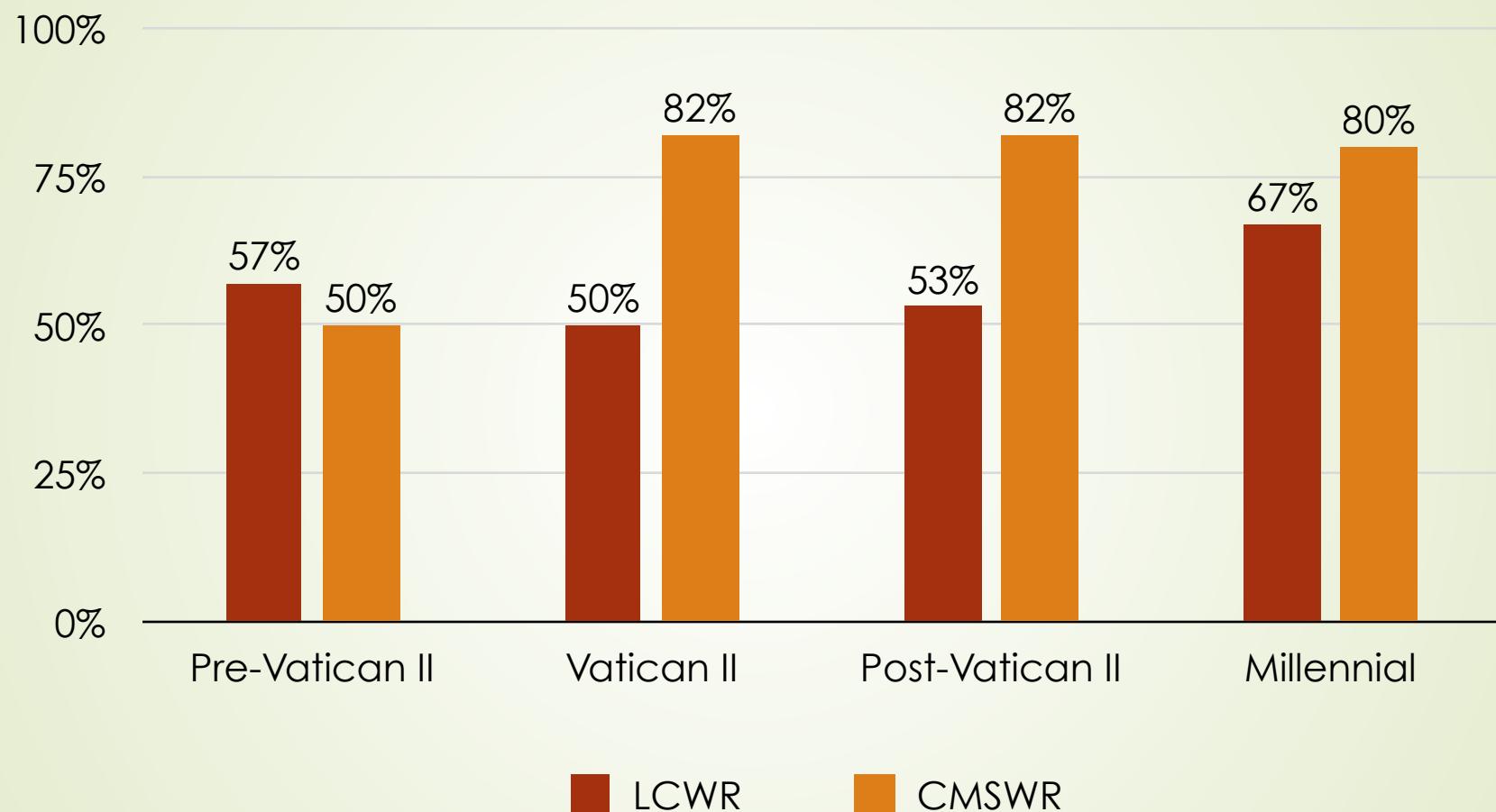


Johnson, Mary, Patricia Wittberg, and Mary Gautier. New Generations of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity. New York: Oxford University Press (2014): p. 87.

## 6. Prayer, Spirituality, and the Vows: Common Core

- **The prayer life of a community is very important to those considering a religious vocation**
- Differences in prayer form preferences of younger and older entrants are striking
  - 1. Millennials are more likely to value Eucharistic adoration, prayer in common, and Marian devotion
  - 2. Older entrants are more interested in faith sharing and less interested in the prayer forms favored by younger entrants

**Figure 6.2 Attracted by the Prayer Life of the Institute**  
(percentage responding “Very Much”)



Johnson, Mary, Patricia Wittberg, and Mary Gautier. New Generations of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity. New York: Oxford University Press (2014): p. 99.

## 7. Community and Ministry: Balancing Life and Work

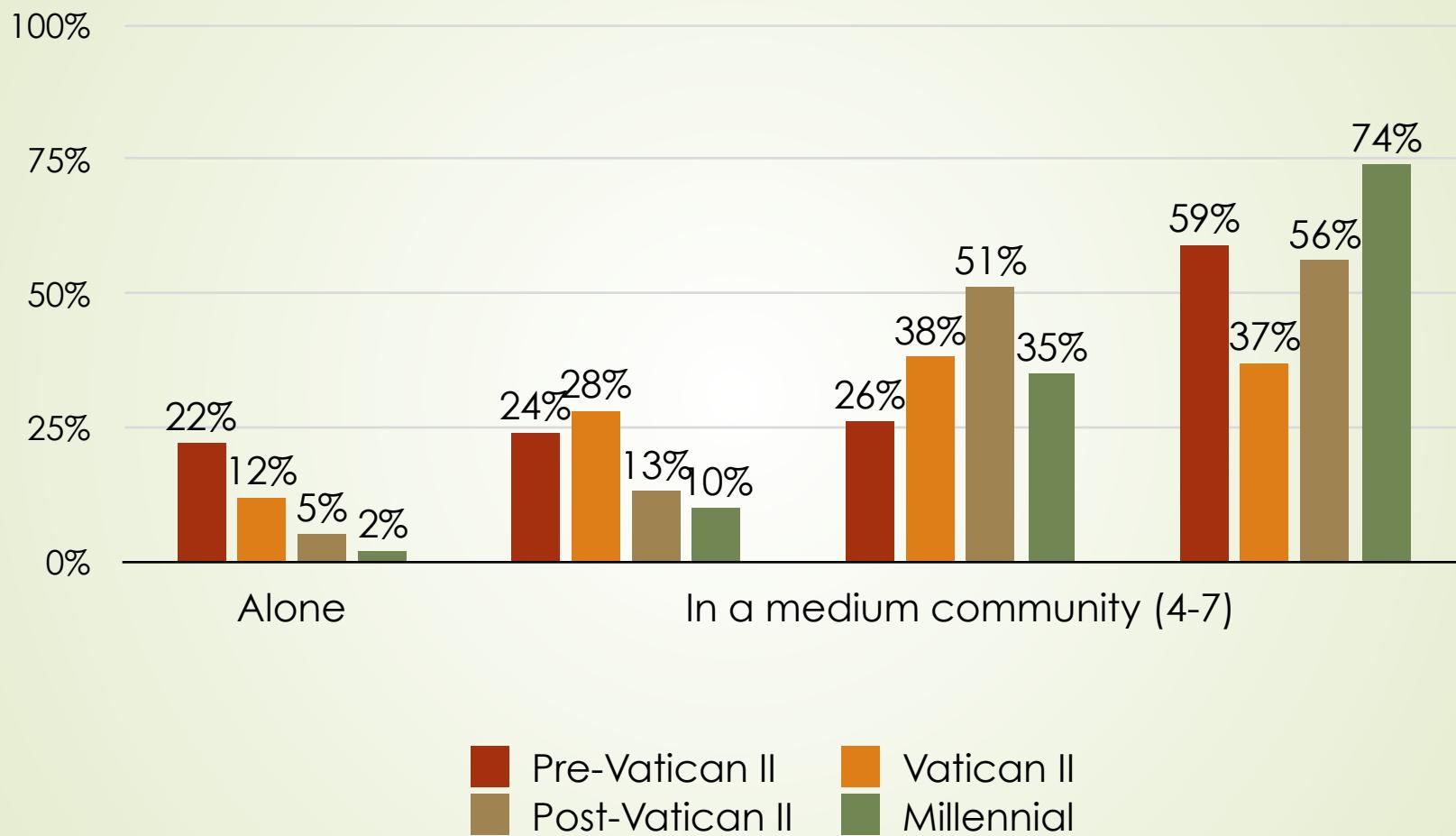
- ▶ Sisters feel the tension between the essential elements of religious life: prayer, community living, and the demands of ministry
- ▶ How to resolve the tension varies greatly by generation, making it necessary for members of each generation to make an effort to see religious life through the eyes of the other

## 7. Community and Ministry (cont.)

- ▶ **Community size:** Nearly 50 percent of Pre-Vatican II and Vatican II cohorts very much prefer living alone or in a small community of two or three; 74 percent of the millennial generation very much prefer living in a large community of eight or more
- ▶ **Ministry:** About 50 percent of Pre-Vatican II and Vatican II cohorts very much prefer ministry in a parish or diocese or in a Catholic organization; 90 percent of the millennial generation very much prefer those choices

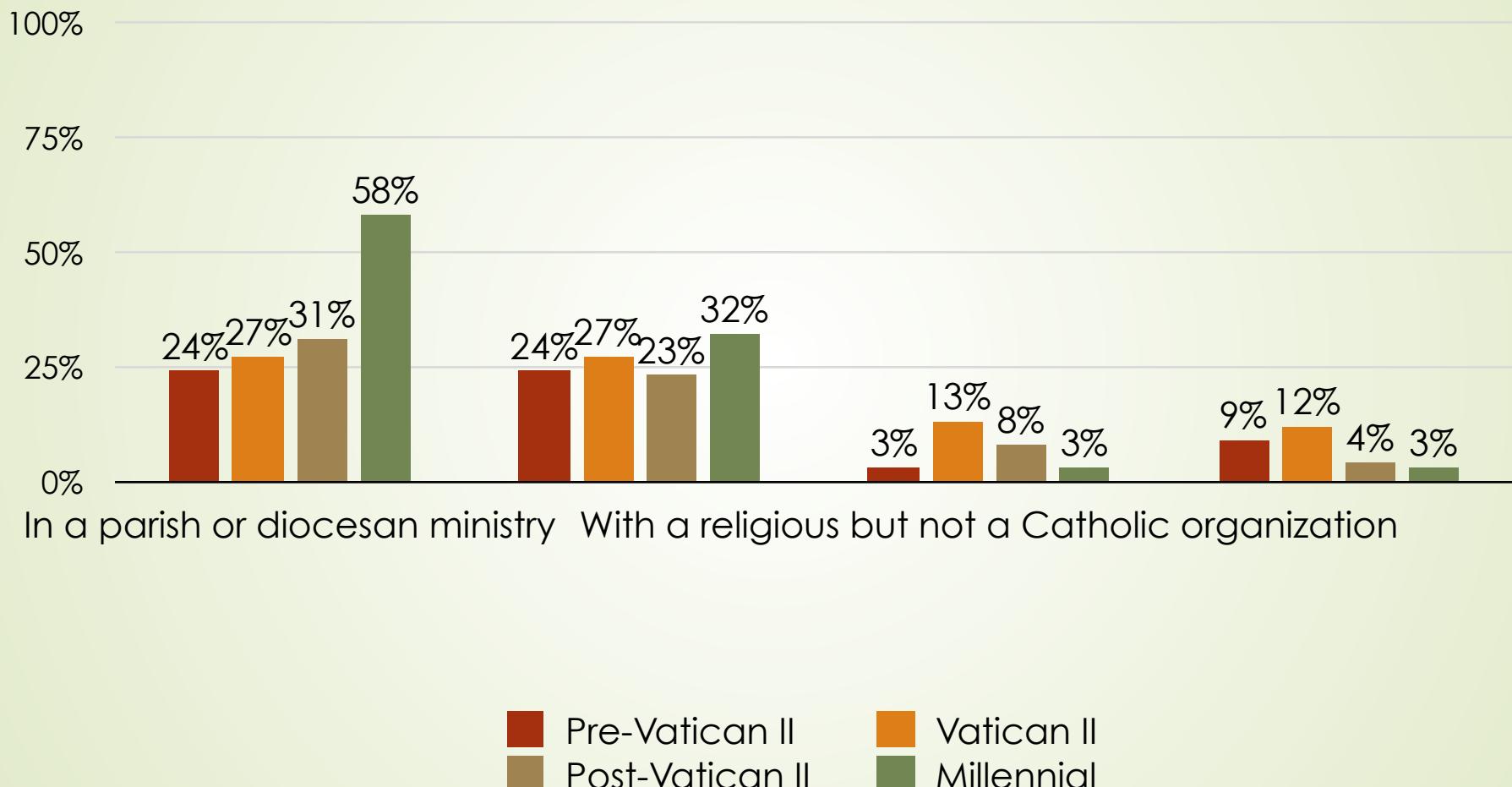
**What accommodations in living and ministry might be acceptable to the various age cohorts?**

## Figure 7.2 How do you prefer living in these settings? (percentage responding “Very Much”)



Johnson, Mary, Patricia Wittberg, and Mary Gautier. New Generations of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity. New York: Oxford University Press (2014): p. 116.

## Figure 7.4 How do you prefer ministry in these settings? (percentage responding “Very Much”)



Johnson, Mary, Patricia Wittberg, and Mary Gautier. New Generations of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity. New York: Oxford University Press (2014): p. 122.

## 8. Conclusion: Inviting the Future

- **Each generation of religious women is a unique culture that tends not to change; it is religiously distinct in large part because of differences in experience and knowledge of the faith and in exposure to the teachings of Vatican II**
  1. LCWR institutes are failing to attract millennial entrants in a significant number
  2. CMSWR institutes attract millennials from a small minority of a traditionalist subculture

**Both groups have problems drawing a large number of entrants; enlarging the pool of potential candidates would require great ideological shifts. Is there readiness to shift in either group?**

## 8. Conclusion: Inviting the Future (cont.)

- **The future of religious life may be in peril unless concerted efforts are made to reach out to those who have considered religious life, but did not choose to enter**
  1. Historically it was religious institutes who were at the forefront of the Church's response to societal ills: "a most formidable influence"
  2. Present-day religious institutes will not be able to lead the Church in evangelizing our increasingly secular youth unless they make changes

**Is one possible alternative course to focus on ethnic groups – primarily Latina and Asian – who might be attracted to one or the other group for various reasons? What other change of course might help?**

## 8. Conclusion: Implications for the Future

- **Religious institutes must rearticulate their mission and vision in a way that will appeal to the deepest needs and hungers of millennial Catholics and beyond. How can this be done?**
- 1. They must first understand the beliefs, values, desires, and preoccupations that attract young people to, or repel them from, considering a religious vocation
- 2. They must construct as many opportunities as possible for different generations to meet and get to know each other, in groups or one-on-one

## 8. Conclusion: Inviting the Future (cont.)

3. They must intentionally train sisters in invitational practices that will be effective across generations
4. They must articulate a charism that provides a sufficiently distinctive group identity, but is also broad enough to appeal to a wide range of potential entrants

**The task for each of us as sisters is to examine our own life of prayer and ministry and commitment to our institute, to “widen the space of our tents” and that of our communities, for the sake of spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ – and for the sake of regenerating our institutes**

## Discussion Questions

- ▶ **What ideas from “New Generations of Catholic Sisters” and from today’s presentation are particularly applicable to your congregation or your situation?**
- ▶ What is the message from this presentation that you want to take back to your communities?
- ▶ **What is the message you want to convey to women who are discerning a vocation?**
- ▶ What ideas can we use as we plan together for the 2015 Year of Consecrated Life?