



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CMSWR 2015 Membership Survey Findings:
Bounty of the Harvest**

Washington, D.C., May 18, 2016 – A new springtime in religious life continues to unfold, according to the results of the 2015 CMSWR Membership Survey, released today.

Where is the vitality in religious life today? Data from the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR) annual survey of the communities whose major superiors (or those analogous to a major superior) are members (or associate members) of CMSWR demonstrate how far and wide the reach of these sisters and their witness extends. The 2015 report prepared for the CMSWR by Sr. Mary Bendyna, OP indicates that the sisters in the CMSWR communities are young. Overall, the average age of the sisters is 57 years old. The average age of postulants is 27 years old, of novices 29 years old, and 32 years old for temporary professed sisters. This is well below the overall average age of women religious nationwide. Almost 1,000 sisters (more than 15%) are currently in initial formation with temporary professed sisters as the largest group followed by novices and postulants. It is interesting to note that according to the 2015 Survey, the age distribution of women religious among CMSWR communities is relatively evenly distributed across age categories from the 30s through the 80s: 16% of female religious are ages 30-39, 14% are ages 40-49, 13% are ages 50-59, 15% are ages 60-69, 15% are ages 70-79 and 12% are ages 80-89.

Who are these religious, and what future do they see? The Holy Spirit moves incessantly in the Church to respond to the needs of the current time. In religious life, this may be expressed in new foundations and charisms. Among communities of the CMSWR membership, less than one third of the 120 institutes were founded in the last fifty years (1966 or later). Many other communities are well established, dating back to their foundation in America or overseas in the 1800s or earlier.

Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, SV, Chairperson of the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious and Superior General of the Sisters of Life explains, “The presence of the well-established communities lends a wisdom and guiding presence to the newer communities. I am sure that without the mentoring support and generosity of these superiors, communities such as ours would never have come to fruition. The CMSWR is blessed to have the older and the younger institutes represented among our membership.”

Data gathered from the 2015 CMSWR Membership Survey Report demonstrates how far and wide the reach of these sisters and their witness extends. From the 106 responses gathered from major superiors who represent CMSWR’s 120 religious communities, the 2015 Report shows a wide range of apostolates that span every field and ministry. Over 80% of professed sisters in the responding communities are engaged in active ministry. The most prevalent areas of outreach are education (19%), healthcare (17%), and evangelization, catechesis, and religious education (11%). The survey asked respondents to count each sister only once, using the category that best describes her primary apostolate. Spanning the United States from coast to coast, these sisters currently serve or live in 137 dioceses in the nation.

Located in Washington, D.C., the CMSWR was founded in 1992 with the canonical approval of St. John Paul II. The sisters of the CMSWR communities represent 120 communities nationwide with approximately 6,000 sisters. For more information, visit cmswr.org.

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