

Average age of priests to be ordained in '07 is 35

WASHINGTON - Results of a survey released April 30 show that the average age of the 475 priests expected to be ordained in the United States this year is 35 and one-third of this year's new priests were born in another country, primarily Vietnam, Mexico, Poland or the Philippines.

The national study of the ordination class of 2007 also shows that the men are well educated. More than six in 10 completed college before entering the seminary and some have advanced degrees in law, medicine and education.

The annual survey of new priests was initially developed in 1998 by the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Vocations and Priestly Formation. Last year, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University began conducting it for the U.S. bishops.

For this year's analysis, CARA researchers contacted the 475 ordinands by e-mail, telephone and fax. A total of 282 ordinands responded, or roughly 60 percent. The group includes 221 who will be ordained for dioceses and 60 for religious orders. One respondent did not specify.

Respondents represent 98 archdioceses, dioceses and eparchies and 33 religious orders.

Seven in 10 respondents reported their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian, European American or white. Eleven percent are Asian/Pacific Islander; 11 percent are Hispanic/Latino; and 5 percent are African-American.

According to the survey report, nearly all of the new priests have been Catholic since birth; 6 percent joined the Catholic Church from mainline and evangelical Protestant traditions and one converted from Buddhism.

Half of the ordinands attended Catholic elementary school, as have almost half of all U.S. Catholics, the report said. They attended Catholic high school and college in

larger numbers than the overall U.S. adult Catholic population.

About two-thirds of the ordinands had full-time work experience, primarily in education, before entering the seminary. Almost one in 10 of them served in the U.S. Armed Forces and some have been directly impacted by the U.S.-led Iraq War.

The brother of Matthew Fasnacht, who will be ordained for the Diocese of Winona, Minn., was killed in Iraq in 2005 by a remote-controlled bomb. Michael Fasnacht was an Army Ranger.

Several ordinands are either in the reserves or have had previous military experience; they include Darren Eldridge, from the Diocese of Lafayette, La., who was in the Air Force for 16 years, and Franciscan Brother George Corrigan, a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, who served aboard nuclear submarines in the Pacific. Brother Corrigan will be ordained a Franciscan priest.

Timothy Kruthaupt, 55, who will be ordained in June for the Diocese of Greensburg, Pa., was widowed when his son, Alex, was just 16 months old. Now Alex is 27 and is a sergeant in the Army Reserve. Last year he missed his father's ordination to the diaconate when he was deployed to Iraq.

Of the foreign-born ordinands, some had a hard trek to the United States. Marco Antonio Gonzalez, a seminarian for the Diocese of Raleigh, N.C., came to the United States in 1991 with his family, who worked as migrant workers.

Ngoan Phan, who will be ordained for the Archdiocese of San Francisco, was one of thousands of Vietnamese who lived for a time in a Hong Kong refugee camp. Trinh Le, who will be ordained for the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, tried to escape Vietnam after the fall of Saigon in 1975 but was caught and put in a labor camp for six months before he got a sponsor to bring him to the United States.

Although several of the ordinands have had teaching experience, the others hail from a wide range of professions. The group includes a former attorney, an accountant, an architect, the vice president of an advertising agency, a bank vice president, a professional musician and a practicing psychologist.

Two of the seminarians are pilots. Ron Kreilein, who will be ordained for the Diocese

of Evansville, Ind., was a professional pilot for 28 years.

Richard Warsnak, another pilot, who will be ordained for the Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kan., once owned a hot-air balloon company.

The average age for the seminarians is 35; the youngest in the group is 25 and the oldest is 68. The Diocese of Knoxville, Tenn., will ordain two men in their 50s and one who is 60.

Cardinal William H. Keeler will ordain four men for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Nine men will be ordained in the Diocese of Brooklyn, N.Y. Cardinal Edward M. Egan of New York will ordain seven men for the New York Archdiocese and seven men for the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, a religious order founded by Father Bernard Groeschel. Five men will be ordained in the Washington Archdiocese, six in the Los Angeles Archdiocese and eight in the Boston Archdiocese.