

Emerging U.S. consecrated communities

WASHINGTON - In a new directory the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate has identified 165 U.S. Catholic communities of consecrated life that have sprung up since 1965.

A little more than half of the 152 communities that provided membership information by gender admit only women, CARA said, while 24 percent admit only men and 25 percent have men and women members.

Of those 152, in 87 communities all make public vows or promises; in 43, all make private vows or promises; 10 have both vowed and unwowed members; and members do not make vows or promises in 12 communities.

In all, the communities in the directory had more than 1,300 full members and several hundred members in formation.

Thirty-two percent of the communities reported having a new vision or spiritual focus. Twenty-three percent said they followed the Franciscan tradition, 14 percent the Carmelite and 8 percent the Benedictine.

Various other traditions including Ignatian, Dominican, Salesian, Augustinian or a combination of traditions accounted for the spirituality of the remaining 23 percent.

Asked to describe their lifestyle, 52 percent said they were apostolic, 42 percent contemplative, 17 percent evangelical, 16 percent monastic and 7 percent eremitic, that is, living the life of a hermit. CARA said 12 percent did not give enough information to be classified. The totals exceed 100 percent because many gave combinations, with apostolic-contemplative the most common combination.

CARA said the communities profiled revealed several trends including the importance of prayer and contemplation; the attractiveness of poverty as a lifestyle and ministry; a relative decline in nursing, social work and to some extent teaching as traditional apostolates for such communities; and the continued attractiveness of

Franciscan, Benedictine and Carmelite spirituality.

The 126-page directory, titled “Emerging Communities of Consecrated Life in the United States, 2006,” was released in early March.

The directory is organized alphabetically by state. Each community’s listing includes the address, phone and fax numbers, e-mail contact, name of a contact person, date of founding, type of vows or promises, lifestyle, number of full members and number in formation, canonical status and other information to the extent available.

The actual directory of communities is preceded by a 20-page analysis of the information by Mercy Sister Mary E. Bendyna, CARA executive director and editor of the directory.

The new CARA directory is a second edition. The first, titled “Emerging Religious Communities in the United States, 1999,” was based on information compiled by CARA in 1998 and published the following year.

Since 1999, 24 of the 157 communities included in the first directory have disbanded, according to the new study. It said 36 others included in the first directory were determined to be ineligible for inclusion in the current edition.

Sister Mary said there were a variety of reasons for excluding those communities. Some may have had too few members or were found to have been established before 1965 or simply could not be reached to confirm if they still exist, she said.

While 60 communities from the previous directory were dropped, 68 others not in that directory were identified for the second edition, including 18 that were established since 1999.

The communities cover a broad range of possible forms of consecrated life – from religious institutes to secular institutes to societies of apostolic life. The study also included a number of associations of the Christian faithful, although these are distinct from institutes of consecrated or apostolic life in church law.

The study explained that “many emerging communities either have or are seeking canonical status as associations of the Christian faithful. For some groups, being a public association of the faithful is a stage before becoming an institute of

consecrated life – whether religious or secular. For others it is the (final) canonical status they desire.”

The report said only five of the 165 identified communities were established between 1965 and 1969; 35 were formed in 1970-79; 55 in 1980-89; 50 in 1990-99; and 18 in 2000-04. Two communities did not give their year of founding.

One statistic suggested that survival is toughest in the first few years of a new community. Of the 24 that were dissolved since 1999, only three dated back to 1979 or earlier. Seven of them were started in the 1980s and 14 had only been started in the 1990s.

Seventy percent of the communities said they had canonical status, meaning formal legal recognition by the church, and 30 percent either did not have it or did not report whether they had it. In most cases recognition was by the local bishop. Vatican recognition typically does not occur before a community has matured and developed for some time.

Of the 142 communities that originated in the United States, the median number of full members in the communities was seven and the median of those in formation was two. Thirty-seven communities reported more than 15 full members; another 37 reported seven to 15 full members. There were 42 with three to six, 21 with one to two, and five that did not report membership figures.

CARA said it was difficult to compare foreign-based communities with those that originated in the United States because a number of the ones that originated abroad submitted figures for their entire world membership instead of just U.S. membership.

“Emerging Communities of Consecrated Life in the United States, 2006” is available from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate for \$35 plus \$3.95 shipping and handling. The directory may be ordered by regular mail to: CARA, 2300 Wisconsin Ave. N.W., Suite 400, Washington, DC 20007; by phone at: (202) 687-8080; by fax at: (202) 687-8083; by e-mail to: cara@georgetown.edu; or online at: <https://cara.georgetown.edu>, by clicking the “order publications” link.