News
Religious Life



From left: Sr. Comfort Nguvan Anum, Sr. Janet Odey and Sr. Stella Nkechi Anyanwu at their profession of vows with the School Sisters of Notre Dame on April 25, 2015, at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Gboko, Benue State, Nigeria. Each was 38 at the time. (Courtesy of the School Sisters of Notre Dame)



by Gail DeGeorge

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Younger sisters attracting other younger women. Developing relationships as caring adults with young women. Inviting young women to share in service missions with sisters. Participating in campus activities and offering prayer services and retreats. Inviting women discerning religious life in other countries, such as the Philippines, Kenya and Tanzania, to consider joining.

These were among the more than 50 responses to an invitation by Global Sisters Report to share how communities are reaching out to younger women and about new members under age 40 who have joined their community in the past five years. We solicited the submissions following a December story about how U.S. congregations are inviting young women to consider religious life.

While the first part of this three-part series focused on U.S. congregations attracting women from the United States, the submissions included U.S. congregations that have had young women join from the United States as well as international congregations that young women from other countries are joining.

We are sharing some of these submissions this week following the World Day for Consecrated Life. They have been edited for clarity and augmented with additional information from follow-up phone calls and emails.



Sr. Jessica Vitente on Aug. 3, 2019, the day she became a novice with the Sisters of Providence of Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods (Courtesy of the Sisters of Providence of Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods)

Sisters of Providence of Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods

"Having younger sisters really does help bring young sisters," said Sr. Editha Ben, vocation team member of the Sisters of Providence of Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana. "Our newest sisters are present at our come-and-see retreats twice a year and share the realities of their experiences with women who are considering this life."



Sr. Tracey Horan took her first temporary profession vows on June 25, 2017. (Courtesy of the Sisters of Providence of Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods)

The congregation has an active presence on social media and does video interviews with the younger sisters, who also write blogs, Ben said. The congregation gathers women in formation together occasionally to ask what would have been helpful as they were discerning religious life and uses that information in its outreach efforts.

Another opportunity for connection is through the community's White Violet Center for Eco-Justice, which allows interns to volunteer and live at the motherhouse while learning about sustainable living, which can give an "inside look" at life as a sister.

Over the past five years, three women under age 40 have entered the congregation. Sr. Tracey Horan, 32, and Sr. Emily TeKolste, 31, are both in temporary profession. (Both have written columns for GSR.)

Horan had taken immersion and ministry trips to Guatemala and Kenya then volunteered at the White Violet Center for Eco-Justice during her discernment. She entered the Sisters of Providence of Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods in 2014 and made her first temporary profession of vows June 25, 2017. She now ministers at the Kino Border Initiative in Nogales, Arizona.



Sr. Emily TeKolste made her first vows June 30, 2019. (Courtesy of the Sisters of Providence of Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods)

TeKolste made her first profession on June 30, 2019. She works with the Catholic social justice lobby Network in Washington, D.C. TeKolste met Horan when they both lived in the Catholic Worker community in Indianapolis, and the two stayed in contact.

"Tracey did have an influence on Emily and stayed in touch with her," said Sr. Marsha Speth, a member of the new membership team who serves as the director of postulants. "Their shared passion for social justice has continued."

Sr. Jessica Vitente, 35, is a canonical novice who met the Sisters of Providence a few years ago at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress. Her novitiate ceremony was Aug. 3, 2019.

Adrian Dominican Sisters

The Adrian Dominicans reach out to young women several ways, including through a weekly blog in English and Spanish "on discerning God's call for their lives," said Sr. Tarianne DeYonker, co-director of vocations. There's also an online discernment group for those who want to explore religious life in more depth.

Sisters in the field are encouraged to pay attention to the young adults they minister with, go to church with or meet at conferences. The sisters "support them in their search, but more important is to be in relationship with them as adults who care," DeYonker said.



Sr. Katherine Frazier signs her profession document with Sr. Pat Siemen, right, prioress of the Adrian Dominican Sisters, at Frazier's first profession in August 2018. (Courtesy of the Adrian Dominican Sisters / Angela Kessler)

One woman under 40 has joined the U.S. community since 2015: Sr. Katherine Frazier, 34, entered the congregation in August 2015 and made her first profession in August 2018. She is now at Regina Dominican High School in Wilmette, Illinois, working with young women in mission effectiveness and campus ministry.

Two other women from the Philippines under age 40 have also joined in the past five years. Sisters in the Philippines' chapter promote vocations in the Philippines by holding regular days of prayer and reflection for young women interested in pursuing religious life with the Adrian Dominicans.

Sr. Leizel Tedria, 31, made her first profession in February 2019. She now teaches Christian living and English at the Dominican School of Angeles City in the Philippines and assists in preparing the school's religious activities. Sr. Meliza Arquillano, 38, made her first profession in March 2017. She is now in her third year

of college and ministers as canteen manager of the student food at the Dominican School of Angeles City and lives with the Angeles City mining community.

St. Benedict's Monastery

St. Benedict's Monastery in St. Joseph, Minnesota, is a women's community with 182 sisters.

"We offer an evening of prayer and reflection each semester for the women at the College of St. Benedict and participate in other activities through campus ministry," said Sr. Lisa Rose, director of vocations. The community also offers one-day retreat experiences.

Attending the Vocations Jamboree at the University of Mary has become an annual event to partner with other communities in spreading the word about the life of vowed religious among young adults, Rose said.

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  Sr. Bridgette Powers reads her profession document on July 11, 2017, with Sr. Susan Rudolph, prioress of St. Benedict's Monastery. (Courtesy of Benedictine Sr. Nancy Bauer)

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  Sr. Laura Suhr signs her profession document on July 11, 2018, with Sr. Susan Rudolph, prioress of St. Benedict's Monastery. (Courtesy of Benedictine Sr. Nancy Bauer)

Two women under the age of 40, both graduates from the College of St. Benedict, have made first profession in the past five years. Sr. Bridgette Powers, 33, volunteered in another women's religious community for a year after graduation but was not drawn to join them, Rose said. She worked for a year and then returned to school and received her Master of Divinity at St. John's School of Theology and Seminary, which shares a campus with a Benedictine men's monastery. There, Powers fell "in love with the rhythm of their prayer," Rose said.

"As her studies were ending, Powers knew she wanted to continue to develop her prayer life and started conversation with our community," Rose said.

Powers entered the community in August 2015 and made her first profession in July 2017. She now ministers in hospitality at the spirituality center and assists at the reception desk and sacristy at the monastery.

Sr. Laura Suhr, 31, had expressed interest in joining St. Benedict's Monastery as a college student and with a few friends formed a discernment group led by one of the sisters.

"The connection with us continued after she graduated from college," Rose said.

Suhr visited other women's communities in the following years and with encouragement lived several years on her own while teaching grade school. She continued to visit St. Benedict's Monastery on a regular basis as part of her discernment process and entered the community in August 2016. She made her first profession in July 2018. Currently, she does sacristy work and attends St. John's School of Theology and Seminary, where she is pursuing a master's degree in theology.



From left: Sr. Shital Parmar of India, Sr. Alison McCrary of the United States and Sr. Bernadette Mendez of the Philippines at the Sisters for Christian Community's 2019 international assembly in Manila, the Philippines, in January 2019. They are among

the youngest members of the community. (Courtesy of Sr. Margaret Gonsalves)

Sisters For Christian Community

The Sisters For Christian Community has 342 affirmed members and 42 women in religious formation, which is referred to as the Becoming Process, said Sr. Margaret Gonsalves, who is based in India but belongs to a U.S. region. (She also writes columns for Global Sisters Report.)

"The congregation does not conduct any official or organized recruiting. Members reach out to women one-on-one in the workplace, in the parish, the classroom or any other venue where people gather by understanding their desire to be consecrated women in the world, not of the world," she said.

The congregation responds to an average of eight requests for contact per month that are submitted to the community's website. Each woman inquiring about the congregation is paired with a vowed member who serves as a mentor and makes regular contact through Skype, Zoom or WhatsApp video calls. They also meet in person and participate in regional meetings for ongoing formation.



Sisters from the Sisters For Christian Community pose with some Chinese New Year decorations during the community's 2019 international assembly in Manila, the Philippines, in January 2019. (Courtesy of Sr. Margaret Gonsalves)

For the last 10 years, the majority of women joining under the age of 40 are from the Philippines, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and India. Of the 42 women in formation, two are U.S. residents.

First vows are made when it is the consensus of both the candidate and the local region that the candidate fully understands the congregation's mission, vision and process. In the Sisters For Christian Community, first vows are considered to be for life or until the member discerns she is called to another way of life.

In canonical definition, the Sisters For Christian Community are an institute of consecrated life because they take public vows and live in common in the same manner as nearly all other religious congregations, Gonsalves said.

Because they are noninstitutional, the community offers a wide scope to new entrants, as well as sisters transferring from canonical congregations, Gonsalves said.

"The young sisters, all of whom fall naturally within the millennial generation, find the SFCC noninstitutional lifestyle very appealing primarily because it is based on the Vatican II principles of collegiality, dialogue and co-equal vowed consecrated way of life," Gonsalves said.



Sr. Anne Wambach, in the green jacket, and Jacqueline Small, right, at Small's April 28, 2019, postulant ceremony at the entrance to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie's monastery in Erie, Pennsylvania (Courtesy of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie)

Benedictine Sisters of Erie

While the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Pennsylvania, have done a variety of outreach events — college groups, come-and-see retreats, diocesan vocation meet-and-greets — "the most effective is one-on-one contact with those who inquire because they have come here for retreat or enrichment or one-on-one with those who inquire through our community website or community Facebook page," said Sr. Marilyn Schauble, vocation director.

Two women under age 40 have joined in the past five years who found the congregation through its website and Facebook page and were attracted by the

congregation's social justice commitment, she said.

Sr. Valerie Luckey, 31, has professed first vows. She is from the Philadelphia area and has a master's degree in education from St. Joseph University. She does public relations work for the community's Emmaus Ministries, which include a food pantry and Sister Gus' Kids Cafe, and cooks at the community's soup kitchen two evenings a week.

Jacqueline Small, 27, is a postulant. She previously lived at the Benedictine monastery in Erie as an intern with one of the community's ministries, Monasteries of the Heart, an online Benedictine spirituality community, as part of her graduate studies in theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. As a postulant, she continues working for Monasteries of the Heart.



The Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Pennsylvania, bless Sr. Valerie Luckey, in black dress, at her first profession Oct. 21, 2017. (Courtesy of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie)

Felician Sisters of North America

The most helpful events "seem to be the retreats that I've been asked to be a part of," said Sr. Desiré Anne-Marie Findlay, vocations director for the Felician Sisters of North America. "Since large events tend to provide space mostly for quick and passing conversations, I find that my time on retreats with young people leads to deeper and more lasting conversations."

She follows up with visits by inviting young women inquiring about religious life to meet for lunch or coffee or asks sisters in other cities to do so. She also invites inquirers to stay with sisters for a few weeks, typically at the convent in Coraopolis, Pennsylvania, which is a designated house of discernment.

High school students are invited to a Catholic leadership experience called Seeds of Hope, which the Felician Sisters run with the help of sisters from across the country on their retreat property in Holly, Michigan. Women age 21 and older who are not necessarily discerning a vocation can volunteer to be chaperones to the high schoolers. The volunteers' travel is paid for, and it allows them to stay in a retreat center and spend time with the sisters in prayer and community while also assisting in this ministry, Findlay said.

The Volunteers in Mission program for young adults allows them to spend varied lengths of time working alongside the sisters in some of their ministries, such as an after-school program in Coraopolis or other ministries in a remote community in Canada's Northwest Territories or Jacmel, Haiti.

"Since I am fairly new in this ministry, I have mostly spent time doing things 'the way they've always been done' while slowly adding my own style," said Findlay, who became vocation director in the fall of 2017.

She stressed the importance of working with a team, saying, "It's very difficult to do this alone. I find it is important to have others come with me or show up when I can't, but also to share ideas and help me improve what I do and how."

Katie Rotterman, 28, was working in Washington, D.C., for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops when she began considering religious life. She entered into a more formal commitment Feb. 2 as a postulant with the Felician Sisters, who had been at her parish where she grew up.



Sr. Lucy Mukachi Kwalimwa, center left, 40, and Sr. Norah Anne Mogute Oyagi, center right, 39, celebrate their perpetual profession of vows April 30, 2016, at Immaculate Conception Nyabururu Parish, Kissii Diocese, Kenya. (Courtesy of the School Sisters of Notre Dame)

School Sisters of Notre Dame

"With our charism including a focus on struggling for unity and witnessing to unity in a divided world, being educators in all we are and do and being especially sensitive to youth, women and the poor, we reach out to young people by trying to be where they are — a model of accompaniment that seeks opportunities for encounter," said Sr. Bridget Waldorf, vocation minister.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame has 10 provinces throughout the world, two of which are in North America, and sisters serving in 30 countries. Waldorf noted that her response is from a North American perspective and experience.



Sr. Mayara Glayci Lopes Santana, 29, from Brazil, during her first profession of vows Sept. 9, 2018. She presently ministers with families in an impoverished community north of São Paulo, Brazil. (Courtesy of Roseglé Gamba)

The congregation participates in national gatherings of the young church, she said, including the National Catholic Youth Conference, One Call Institute, Youth in Theology and Ministry and others. Sisters also seek opportunities for encounter at local and diocesan levels at Newman Centers on university campuses, Busy Person's Retreats, Nuns and Nones gatherings, vocation awareness or discernment retreats, or parish events during significant times such as Catholic Sisters Week, World Day for Consecrated Life, National Vocation Awareness Week and others.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame also invites young people to connect with them in person or online for prayer, mission experiences and activities such as Paint and Pray.

"Our experience has been one of walking with young women, helping them in their discernment, wherever it may lead," Waldorf said. "Concretely, this means having multiple one-on-one conversations, praying with them for wisdom, and encouragement for their courageous questions."

The congregation has had 19 women under 40 profess vows in the last five years from Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Ghana, Japan, Kenya, Nigeria, Poland, Slovenia and Tanzania. The women have generally completed secondary education and college or equivalent work experience in vocational or professional fields, she said.

"Many have had connections ministering or volunteering in parish settings or with Catholic youth groups," Waldorf said. "Many have come to know SSND through our ministries."



From left: Sr. Whitney Schieltz, Sr. Andrea Koverman, Sr. Romina Sapinoso, Sr. Tracy Kemme and Sr. Annie Klapheke, all Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati. Schieltz, Kemme and Klapheke were all under 40 when they joined the community. (Courtesy of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati)

Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati

The Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati "have focused on building relationships and inviting women through service, living in community and in particular with our initial formation house on the U.S.-Mexico border," said Sr. Monica Gundler, executive councilor. "The sisters there have welcomed young women in discernment for years. They have been a community committed to serving the poor through their ministry

at the border and have walked in discernment with all five of our newer members. We have also offered opportunities for service and community at our federation house in New Orleans."

Three women under 40 have entered the congregation in the past five years. Sr. Tracy Kemme, 33, is in graduate school at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. She has broad experience ministering with migrants and refugees and has served in parish ministry as well as with the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Catholic Social Action Office. (She is also a columnist for Global Sisters Report.) She made her first vows in June 2015 at age 28.

Sr. Annie Klapheke, 33, is ministering as a dietician at the Good Samaritan Free Health Center in Cincinnati. She is a dancer, is involved with Ignatian Spirituality Project retreats for people who are homeless and serves on a variety of committees in the congregation. She made her first vows in December 2016.

Sr. Whitney Schieltz, 31, is also ministering in Cincinnati at Working In Neighborhoods. She has a background in historic preservation and architecture. She made her first vows in August 2019.

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From left: Sr. Joan Cook, president of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Sr. Annie Klapheke, and Sr. Donna Steffen, the community's novice director, on Dec. 10, 2016, the day Klapheke made her first vows with the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati. (Courtesy of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati)

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Sr. Tracy Kemme, right, and Sr. Joan Cook, president of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, at Kemme's profession of first vows with the community June 27, 2015 (Courtesy of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati)

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  Sr. Whitney Schieltz made her first vows with the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati on Aug. 24, 2019 (Courtesy of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati)

Sisters of St. Francis of Savannah, Missouri

A connection with a sister from Kenya who was studying in the United States gave this community of six sisters in rural northwest Missouri an opportunity to reach out to women discerning vocations in African countries, said Sr. Christine Martin, community leader of the Sisters of St. Francis of Savannah, Missouri, a U.S. province of the Franciscan Sisters of Vöcklabruck, Austria.

A sister with the Little Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi of Nairobi was studying at the University of St. Mary in Leavenworth, Kansas, about seven years ago. She stayed periodically with the Sisters of St. Francis of Savannah, who were about 50 miles away, because of their common Franciscan charism.

Through her, the Sisters of St. Francis of Savannah came to know families in the area who were from Kenya and other African countries. They learned there were women in Kenya, Tanzania and other countries who were being turned away from

some congregations in those countries because they had too many applicants.



Clockwise from left: Sr. Winfred Kilatya; Sr. Kathleen Reichert, formation director for the Sisters of St. Francis of Savannah, Missouri; Sr. Neema Mwigune; and Sr. Raphael Speichinger on Sept. 5, 2018 (Courtesy of the Sisters of St. Francis of Savannah)

The congregation worked through immigration challenges with the help of Catholic Legal Immigration Network, and Sr. Winfred Kilatya, 32, from Kenya is in her first year of profession and preparing for her second year. She is training to be a preschool child care provider and hopes to serve in a nearby Catholic school.

The congregation also has a novice from Tanzania, Sr. Neema Mwigune, 39. Kilatya and Mwigune assist in the congregation's ministry to the rural poor, volunteering at food pantries and serving on the board of a nonprofit organization that assists farmers and rural businesses. They also work in the congregation's community garden, which serves people who are poor and elderly in the county.

The immigration process is lengthy and the legal fees can be expensive, Martin said, and it's hard to sponsor the women without a discernment period first. The congregation was preparing to welcome two other candidates, one from Kenya, 27, and one from Tanzania, 42, but they were denied entry to the United States. The congregation is considering what steps to take next, Martin said, but she said she hopes to start their sponsorship soon.

"You can only do so much discernment through email and Skyping," she said. "There are immigration challenges to deal with, but these are the ones who are also reaching out to us."

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This story appears in the **World Day for Consecrated Life** feature series. View the full series.