

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
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Washington, DC

*Vocations Ministry among Hispanics:
A Study of Diocesan Vocation Directors*



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Executive Summary

In winter 2012 the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors (NCDVD) commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) for a study of its members to study the impediments and successes encountered by diocesan vocation directors as they work to promote vocations to priesthood among Hispanics. This report presents findings from a national survey of Diocesan Vocation Directors who were members of NCDVD in 2012.

In collaboration with NCDVD, CARA developed a questionnaire for diocesan vocation directors who are members of NCDVD. The questionnaire was then programmed by NCDVD into an Internet survey and hosted on NCDVD servers. NCDVD sent an e-mail to all 179 members in late June requesting their participation in the survey. After repeated reminders, a total of 127 Diocesan Vocation Directors submitted a completed survey, for a response rate of 71 percent.

The questionnaire asked diocesan vocation directors about their tenure as a vocation director, their fluency with Spanish, the capacity within their office to handle inquiries in Spanish, and the vocations materials they produce in a language other than English. It asked about the number of Hispanics currently in formation for the diocese as well as the number of Hispanic inquirers they have had in the past 12 months. The survey also asked about the number of vocations programs they attended in the last year, whether any of these are offered in Spanish, and how many Hispanics they noted in attendance. Finally, vocation directors were asked to assess their personal assets that contribute to their success in vocations work among Hispanics as well as factors that they see as impediments to that work.

Major Findings

- Diocesan vocation directors are, on average, 44 years of age and half have been priests for ten years or more. They have served in that position for an average of four years. Compared to all priests nationally, vocation directors are slightly more ethnically diverse. Compared to recent diocesan ordinands, vocation directors are more likely to be U.S.-

born, but the proportion of vocation directors and ordinands from most other major sending countries (e.g., Mexico, Vietnam, Philippines) is similar.

- On average, vocation directors rate themselves as less than competent in speaking, writing, or reading Spanish. Hispanic vocation directors consider themselves nearly fluent in all three. Four in ten vocation directors have assistance from someone else in office who speaks Spanish. Three in five directors have access to vocations materials or media in a language other than English, either self-produced or developed by others. Several mentioned NCDVD resources in Spanish that they use.
- Vocation directors report an average of just under five Hispanics currently in formation for the diocese. Hispanic vocation directors are more likely than non-Hispanic vocation directors to have at least one Hispanic candidate currently in formation for the diocese. The average number of Hispanic men in formation is 11 in dioceses that have a Hispanic vocation director, compared to four in dioceses in which the vocation director is not Hispanic.
- Hispanic vocation directors average about eight serious inquirers in the past 12 months who are Hispanic, compared to about half as many Hispanic inquirers reported by non-Hispanic vocation directors. About a quarter of these Hispanic serious inquirers were born in the United States.
- Vocation directors attended, on average, about four high school vocation events in 2011. One in four directors reported that as many as half the attendees at these events were Hispanic. Nearly all vocation directors report that their diocese offers at least one vocation program in Spanish, but three-quarters or more say that such a program is offered on a less than annual basis.
- Vocation directors say that their priesthood and their ability to enjoy people from cultures other than their own are the two personal assets that contribute most to their vocations work among Hispanics. Nearly all responding Hispanic vocation directors agree that their priesthood, their enthusiasm for their ministry, their access to the Hispanic community, and their understanding of the ethnic/national culture are personal assets that contribute “very much” to their vocations work among Hispanics.
- Two in three vocation directors report that fear among Hispanic inquirers about their legal or immigration status at least “somewhat” impedes their vocations work with that group. Half agree that inquirers’ inability to speak English is another impediment to their vocations work and four in ten feel that a lack of formal education among Hispanic candidates as well as their reluctance to interact with others outside the Hispanic community are at least “somewhat” of an impediment to their vocations work.