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Assumptions all wrong about growth of women's religious orders

Robert McClory | Aug. 16, 2012 NCR Today

One thing "we all know for sure" is that the old liberal orders of Catholic sisters (member groups of LCWR, that is) are dying. They're getting no new vocations, the average age of the sisters is upper 70s, and they will all be gone in a decade or two. Another thing "we all know for sure" is that the young conservative orders (full habit, proudly obedient member groups of the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious) are growing at an incredible rate, and they are ready to take over. These orders can hardly accommodate all the young women who want to enter, and they tend to get lots of visibility when the media covers "modern" Catholic nuns.

It turns out what "we all know for sure" is simply not true. The old orders and the new orders are receiving new members at almost the same rate, according to data from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. An article in Wednesday's edition of *America* magazine analyzes the findings in detail.

"One of the most striking findings regarding new entrants," say the writers," is that almost equal numbers of women have been attracted to institutes in both conferences of women religious in the U.S. in recent years. As of 2009, L.C.W.R. institutes reported 73 candidates/postulants, 117 novices and 317 sisters in temporary vows/commitment. C.M.S.W.R. institutes reported 73 candidates/postulants, 158 novices and 304 sisters in temporary vows/commitment."

Read the full article here [1].

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