



The Role of the Family in Nurturing Priestly Vocations

SEPTEMBER 17, 2015

MARY L. GAUTIER, PH.D.

CENTER FOR APPLIED RESEARCH IN THE APOSTOLATE (CARA)

Description of the Study



- ❖ Contacted 191 Diocesan Vocation Directors for names of those who had entered diocesan formation since 2000 and stayed. Received names from 92 percent of DVDs.
- ❖ Surveyed 4,140 priests and seminarians who were accepted into formation for priesthood in dioceses since 2000. Received 1,352 responses (715 priests and 637 seminarians), for a response rate of approximately 33 percent.
- ❖ These men provided contact information for 748 family members. Received 414 survey responses from family members (55 percent).
- ❖ Conducted two focus groups with 15 family members, in Washington, DC, and Chicago

Major Findings from Diocesan Priests and Seminarians

- ❖ Typically from a Catholic family who actively practiced their faith while growing up. Two in three say the family attended Mass weekly and one in ten attended more than weekly. Hispanic/Latino respondents least likely to say family attended Mass weekly or more often.
- ❖ A third had a relative who is a priest or a religious and seven in ten knew one growing up. Asian respondents are most likely to have known a priest, a brother, or a religious sister growing up.
- ❖ Four in ten admit that starting a discussion with family about vocation was not easy. A similar proportion said that no member of their family had ever spoken with them about a vocation.
- ❖ When first considering a vocation, six in ten or more received at least “some” encouragement from parents, siblings, grandparents, and aunts and uncles. Mothers and grandparents were most likely to offer “very much” encouragement. Those who were discouraged by a family member were most likely discouraged by sibling(s), aunts/uncles, or father. Currently, nearly all say their immediate family is encouraging of their vocation.

Characteristics of Diocesan Priests and Seminarians

Age of Respondents			
	Seminarians	Priests	Overall
Average	28	40	35
Median (Midpoint)	26	37	32
Minimum	19	26	19
Maximum	73	77	77

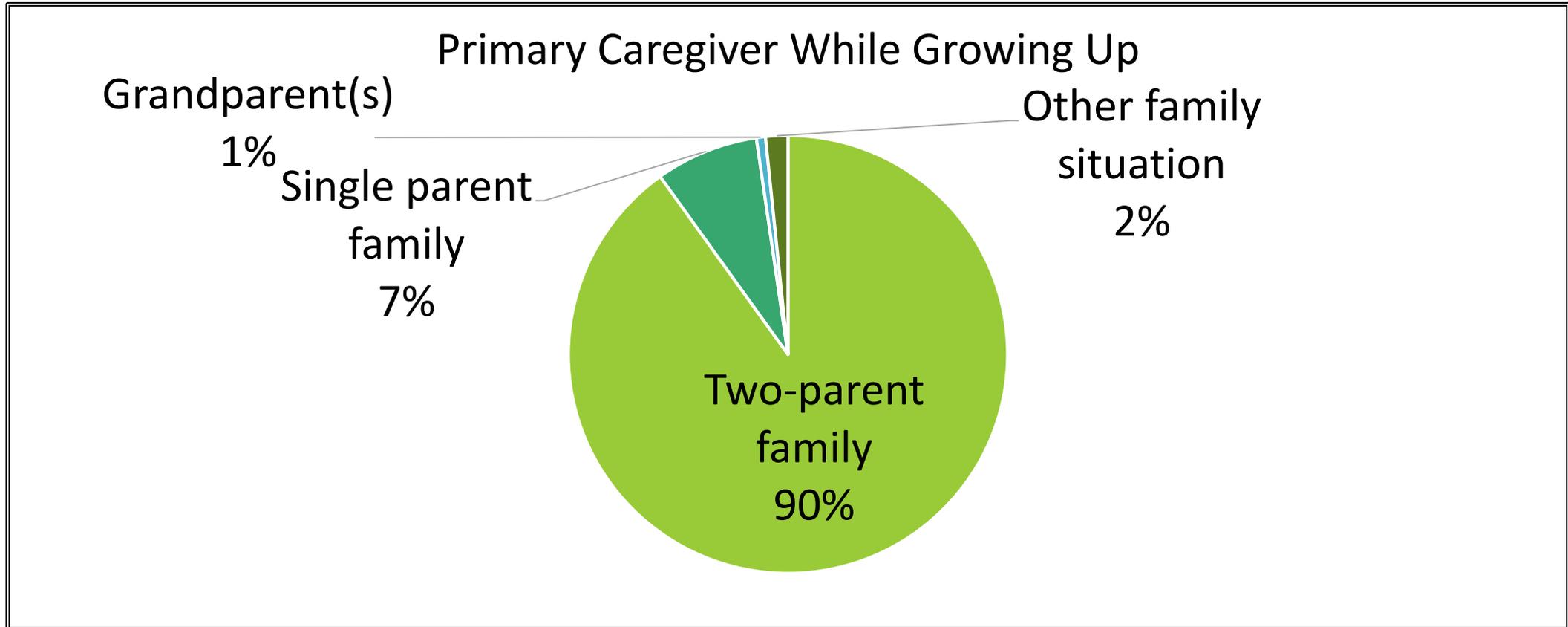
Characteristics of Diocesan Priests and Seminarians

Primary Ethnicity/Cultural Background		
	Seminarians	Priests
Caucasian/European American/White	74%	83%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	15	8
Native American/ Alaska Native/ Other	6	5
Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	3	2
African/African American/Black	2	2

Characteristics of Diocesan Priests and Seminarians

- ❖ Two in three attended Catholic schools for some or all of their education. They are more likely than other Catholics nationally to have attended a Catholic high school and six times more likely to have attended a Catholic college or university.
- ❖ Nearly half of responding seminarians (46 percent) earned an undergraduate degree before entering the seminary.
- ❖ The average age when respondents report first considering a vocation is 16 for responding seminarians and 17 for responding priests. The average age when current seminarians first entered a seminary is 23, compared to an average of 27 for current diocesan priests. The average of ordination to the priesthood is 35.

Family Characteristics of Diocesan Priests and Seminarians



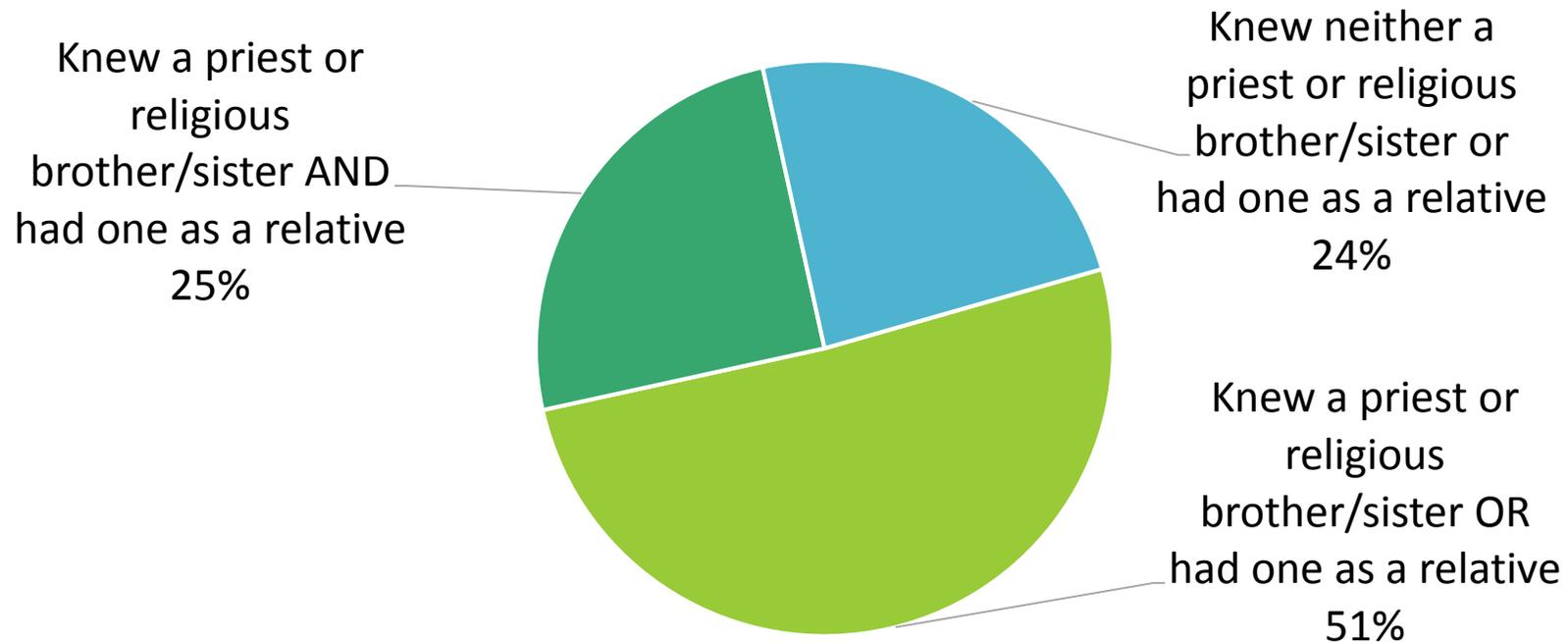
Family Characteristics of Diocesan Priests and Seminarians

Parents Religion and Respondents' Religious Rearing

	Respondent Raised Catholic	Not Raised Catholic
Both parents Catholic	99%	1%
Only one parent Catholic	90	10
Neither parent Catholic	27	73

Family Characteristics of Diocesan Priests and Seminarians

Exposure to Priests or Religious Brothers/Sisters



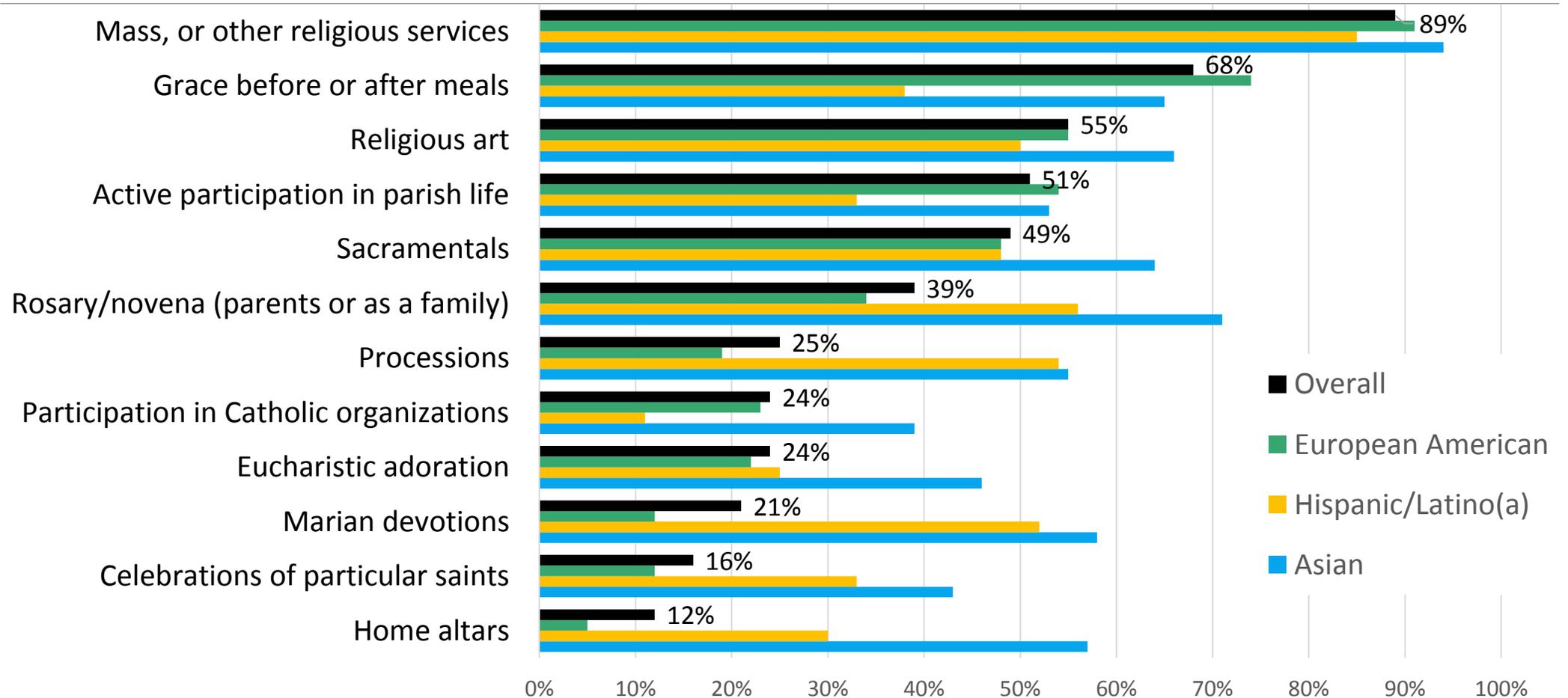
Religious Characteristics of the Family

- ❖ Two in three attended Mass weekly with the family while growing up and 19 percent attended more than weekly.
- ❖ One in five report that the family typically prayed together daily (apart from meal blessings). However, 44 percent of European Americans and 31 percent of Hispanic/Latinos say the family seldom/never prayed at home together.
- ❖ One in four were *more* religious than other family members growing up and one in 20 were *less* religious than others growing up.

Important Religious Activities/Customs

Family Members	Religious	Diocesan
Mass	Mass	Mass
Grace	Grace	Grace
Religious art	Religious art	Religious art
Active participation in parish	Sacramentals	Active participation in parish
Sacramentals	Active participation in parish	Sacramentals

Important Religious Practices/Customs



Family Members' Support of Vocations

- ❖ *A more serious commitment to family prayer would have been helpful*
- ❖ *A Catholic culture that included more than Sunday Mass*
- ❖ *Although we read Bible stories and prayed before meals, we didn't often talk about our faith*
- ❖ *Actively asking if I thought I had a calling to be a priest, making it understood that it was an option and that it was normal*
- ❖ *Discussion about how to properly discern; discussion about how they discerned big decisions in their lives*



For further information:

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

cara.georgetown.edu

Nineteensixty-four.blogspot.com

@caracatholic

202-687-8080