

# Education in Multiculturality Education to Interculturality

In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education  
and in Formation Communities  
for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy

Edited by  
**Enrica Ottone – Luca Pandolfi**



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**EDUCATION IN MULTICULTURALITY  
EDUCATION TO INTERCULTURALITY**  
**In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education  
and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy**

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*Front cover*

Pavel Égüez, *Grito de los Excluidos*, mural en cerámica.  
Cotacachi, Ecuador 2001  
(Photograph by Luca Pandolfi, 2007)

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“

*Diversity always proves a bit frightening, for it challenges our securities and the status quo. [...] In the face of cultural, ethnic, political and religious diversity, we can either retreat into a rigid defense of our supposed identity, or become open to encountering others and cultivating together the dream of a fraternal society.*

”

POPE FRANCIS

*Speech to the Hungarian Episcopal Conference*  
Apostolic visit to Budapest, September 12, 2021

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# International Sisters in the United States of America: A Sociological Study

❖ Mary L. Gautier



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## Abstract

Although Catholic sisters have been coming to the United States for religious missions since the 1700s, very little was known about contemporary trends among international women religious working and living in the United States. Researchers from Trinity Washington University and from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University collaborated on the first-ever sociological study of international women religious in the United States. For the purpose of this study, an “international sister” is a woman religious who was born outside the United States and is now living in the United States, in ministry, in study, or in residence here. This study of over 4,000 international sisters from more than 80 countries on seven continents presents a comprehensive portrait of their paths to ministry, challenges, satisfactions, contributions, and advice for those who would come after them.

## Keywords

Catholic sisters – International women religious – Migration – Ministry

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## 1

### Introduction

Migration of Catholic women religious to the United States for religious mission is certainly not new – indeed, Catholic sisters from Europe made up the vast majority of women religious ministering in the United States as late as the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>1</sup>. Very little is known, however, about more contemporary migration trends among women religious.

This study is the first ever national study of international women religious (i.e., religious sisters and nuns) conducted in the United States. Funded by the GHR Foundation, researchers from Trinity Washington University and from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University collaborated to design and implement the research. For the purpose of this study, an “international sister” is a woman religious who was born outside the United States and is now living in the United States, in ministry, in study, or in residence here. This study uses the term “religious institute” to refer to any religious congregation, order, province, region, or monastery with separate governance. The study distinguishes between U.S. based religious institutes (i.e., those with a motherhouse or province headquarters in the United States) and those individuals and houses of non-U.S. based religious institutes.

The study, conducted in 2015 and 2016, involved three pieces of research. The first was a survey of religious institutes that was addressed to the religious superiors of all U.S. based religious institutes. We sent a brief survey to over 500 U.S. based institutes of women religious and asked them for the names of their international sisters. We received 336 surveys back and the superiors gave us the names of 1,678 international sisters. We also contacted the Vicar for Religious in all U.S. dioceses and asked them for the names of international sisters working in their diocese. This request gave us another 1,866 non-duplicated international sisters.

In all, we located over 4,000 international sisters in the United States, who we then surveyed for the second part of this project. The third piece of research included 26 interviews and focus groups with some of these international sisters, to learn from them in their own words about the challenges and rewards of their experience. The breadth of diversity of the sisters surveyed and interviewed gives a sense of the dynamism of the international dimension of women’s religious life.

## 2

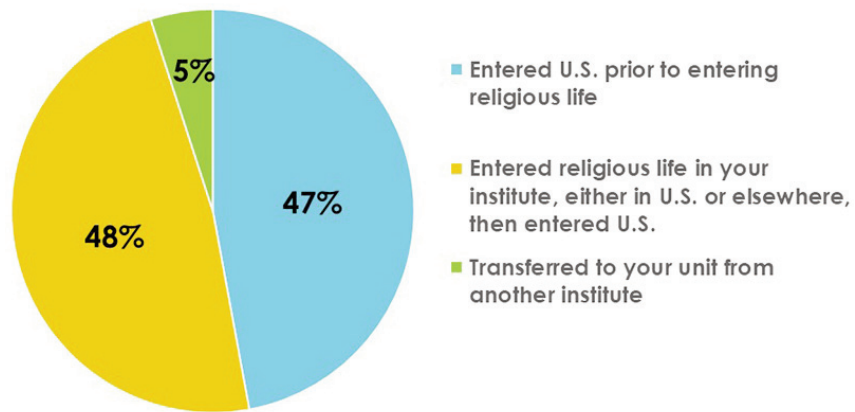
### Findings from the Institute Survey

Among the women’s institutes that responded to the Institute Survey, about one-third (32%) are small institutes (under 25 vowed members). Another third are “mid-sized”, having between 26 and 100 vowed members, and another third are “large”, with over 100 vowed members. Nearly six in ten (59%) define themselves as being part of an international institute. While four-fifths (81%) of the institutes report having at least one international member, small institutes are the most likely to say that more than half their members are international sisters. Mid-sized and large institutes are more likely to report that less than 10 percent of their members are international.

What can these institutes tell us about the international sisters that are living in the United States? According to the major superiors, nearly half of their international sisters came to the United States first and then entered religious life within the United States. A similar proportion entered religious life first and then came to the United States as international sisters. Just 5% transferred to a U.S. institute from another religious institute outside the United States.



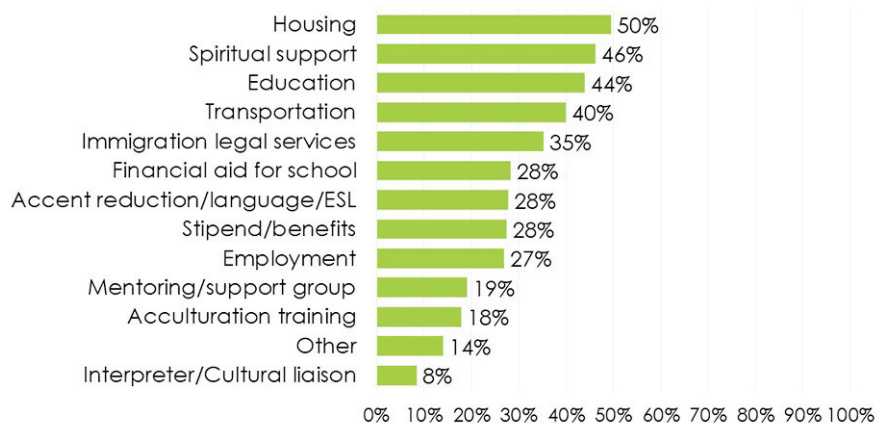
**Graph. 1** – Pathways among international sisters in U.S. based religious Institutes



In some cases, U.S. religious institutes offer hospitality or support to individual international sisters from other institutes by hosting them while they are in the United States for study or ministry. It is expected that these international sisters will not stay in the United States but will return to their home country when their study or ministry is completed. Among institutes that have hosted international sisters, about four in ten had at least one international sister who had contacted them from abroad with a request to live with them for a time. About a third had at least one international sister who had contacted them from within the United States with a similar request. Very few had been contacted by a diocese with a request for hospitality for an international sister and just 2% had a sister who just showed up without prior contact or notification.

What sort of support is provided to international sisters who are living in the United States? The most common type of support is housing, followed by spiritual support, education, and transportation. Between 40 and 50% of major superiors have offered one or more of these types of assistance to international sisters.

**Graph. 2** – Typical assistance provided to international sisters



More than a third of major superiors say that their institute has provided immigration legal services to international sisters. About three in ten have provided language support, such as accent reduction or English as a Second Language (ESL). Three in ten have provided monetary support, such as financial aid for school, a stipend for ministry, or some type of employment. About one in five have provided mentoring or some type of support group and the same proportion have provided some other type of acculturation training. About one in ten has provided an interpreter or some sort of cultural liaison to international sisters.

The major superiors in these institutes were asked what is most needed to improve the life and ministry of international sisters. The most common response to this question mentioned providing acculturation training or orientation for them. The next most common response referred to language training. Still other responses included assistance with immigration legal services, health service, education, and spiritual formation.

Finally, the major superiors responding for the institutes said that what is most needed is to help the international sisters feel welcomed and supported in the community. They emphasized that it was important for the U.S. born sisters and the international sisters to understand each other's culture.

3

## Findings from the International Sister Survey

In mid-2015, we mailed a survey, in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, to 3,544 international sisters who had been identified by religious institutes and diocesan Vicars for Religious. We distributed additional surveys at public presentations and through other organizations with access to international sisters, such as Catholic Extension, the Mexican American Catholic College, Assumption College for Sisters, the African Sisters Education Collaborative, and Formation Support for Vietnam. By early 2016, we received 1,143 completed surveys from international sisters in 257 different religious institutes from 83 countries around the world.

In addition to the written surveys, over the course of a year we conducted 26 interviews and focus groups throughout the United States, with international sisters from 28 countries on five continents. Some participants came from congregations that were primarily white, others from the three traditionally black institutes in the United States, still others from Latina, African, and Asian institutes. The participants varied in age, length of time in the United States, length of time in religious life, and place of entrance (either in their home country or in the United States). The participants included active sisters, retired sisters, and nuns in two monasteries of different traditions. The active and retired sisters represent a variety of institutes, charisms and ministries. The interviewees can be described as progressive and traditional in their theologies, perspectives, and experiences of religious life. Some of them came here as children or teens with their families, and entered religious life here. Most came as adults and either entered here or came here already as sisters to study or work.

Each interview or focus group lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and centered around these four basic questions: 1) The experience of arriving in the United States, 2) The challenges they faced in living and working in the United States, 3) The contributions they make to religious life and ministry in the United States, and 4) Advice they have for future arrivals and those who would welcome them. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed to supplement the quantitative surveys.

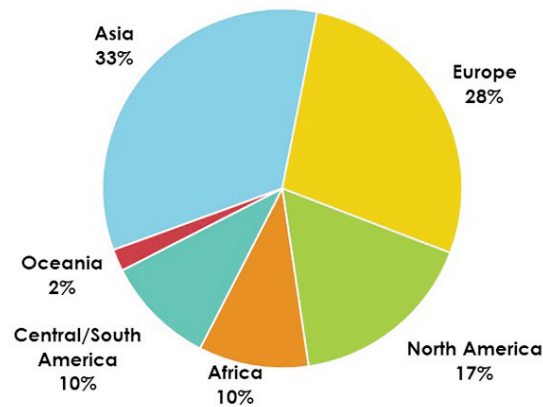
4

## Where are they from?

The sisters in this study come from 83 countries across six continents. Asia is the largest sending continent, and Oceania the smallest. One in three responding international sisters was born in one of the Asian nations. Among the Asian international sisters, Vietnam accounts for 44% of the international sisters, the Philippines 24%, and India 23%. Among European sending nations, Ireland accounts for 41%, Poland 18% and Italy 10%. North America is represented by Mexico, which sent 79% of the sisters, and Canada with 21%.

From Africa, 38% of the sisters are from Nigeria, 16% from Uganda, over 10% from Kenya, and 10% from Tanzania. From Central/South America, the four largest sending countries are Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador and Peru. As for Oceania, 71% of the sisters come from Australia and 14% from Samoa.

**Graph. 3** – Continent of origin of responding international sisters



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### What was their pathway to the United States?

Almost 40% of responding international sisters entered their current institute outside the United States and then were sent to the United States for ministry. 28% came to the United States before entering religious life. 13% entered their current institute outside the United States, then were sent to the United States for study. 10% were sent to the United States for religious formation.

**Tab. 4** – Pathways to the United States

	%
I entered religious life in this congregation outside the United States, then was sent to the United States for ministry	39
I came to the United States prior to entering religious life	28
I entered religious life in this congregation outside the United States, then was sent to the United States for study	13
I entered religious life in this congregation outside the United States, then was sent to the United States for part of my religious formation	10
I transferred to a U.S. province of my congregation from another province outside the United States	6
I transferred to my congregation in the United States from another congregation outside the United States	2
I came to the United States to enter religious life in the United States	2

A smaller number came to the United States via other ways. 6% transferred to a U.S. province of their institute from another province outside the United States. 2% transferred to their institute in the United States from another institute outside the United States. Finally, 2% came to the United States in order to enter religious life.

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### Who are these international sisters?

On average, these international sisters are 58 years old, much younger than the typical U.S. born sisters. Nearly all of them are in active ministry – only one in ten is over age eighty and most likely no longer in active ministry. On average, they entered religious life at age 23 and entered the United States at age 30. They have been serving in the United States for an average of 27 years.

**Tab. 5** – Characteristics of international sisters

- Average age is 58
- Nine in ten are active
- On average, entered religious life at age 23 and entered the U.S. at age 30

Length of Time in United States	
15 years or fewer	41%
16–30 years	20%
31–50 years	18%
51 years or longer	21%
Average years	27
Median years	22

About one-third of responding international sisters identifies as Asian/Pacific Islander. Another third identifies as European, Canadian, or Australian. One fifth identifies as Latin American/Mexican. And one in ten identifies as African or Afro-Caribbean.

**Tab. 6** – Characteristics of international sisters

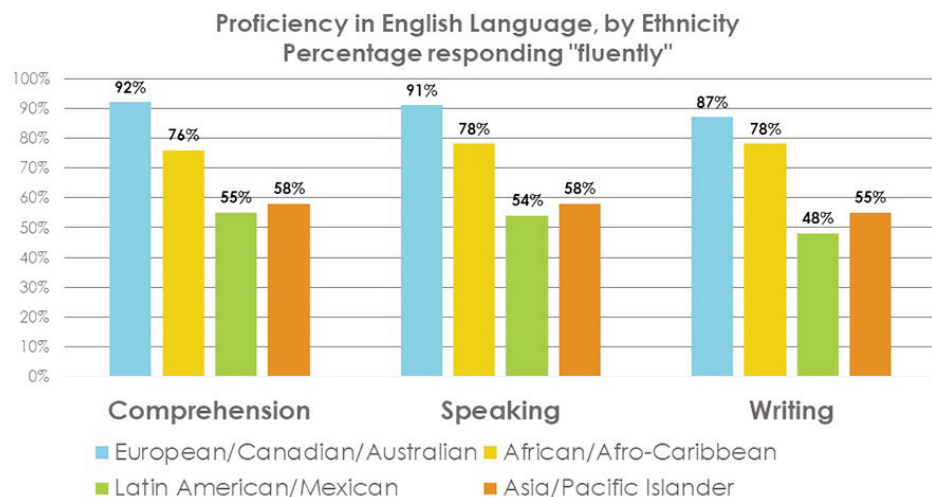
What best describes your primary ethnicity/cultural background?	
	%
Asian/Pacific Islander	35
European/Canadian/Australian	33
Latin American/Mexican	21
African/Afro-Caribbean	11

7

## How proficient do they consider themselves to be in the English language?

70% of the responding international sisters are fluent or native in English language skills. A quarter or more comprehend, speak, and write in English at a minimum proficiency. Only 4 to 6% have no or limited English proficiency. The longer international sisters stay in the United States, the more fluently they master the English language.

**Graph. 7** – Proficiency in English



Of course, those whose native language is English as well as those who have English as a secondary language taught in the schools of their country are more likely to have English proficiency. International sisters from Latin America and from Asia are less likely to be fluent in English and to need assistance in acquiring English proficiency.

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### What is their level of education?

The responding international sisters are highly educated. More than seven in ten earned an undergraduate or graduate degree. More than one in ten completed some college and another 2% have a trade school or technical school certificate. Just over one in ten has completed only secondary school or less.

**Tab. 8** – Level of education

	%
Graduate or professional degree	53
College or university undergraduate degree	20
Some college, but not a bachelor's degree	14
High school/Secondary school or less	11
Trade or technical school	2

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### What are their current ministries?

85% of the respondents are in active ministry. Of those, 21% serve in parish/diocesan/ethnic group ministry. 20% serve in hospital/health care ministry. 15% serve in education, with another 1% serving in campus ministry. 14% are students. 13% serve their institutes in leadership, vocation and formation work. 9% serve in social service ministry, and 5% are contemplatives living in monasteries. 3% responded as serving in other ministries, most of which are spiritual direction or retreats.

**Tab. 9** – Level of education

(Among respondents who are active in ministry)	%
Parish/diocesan/ethnic group ministry	21
Hospital/healthcare ministry	20
Education/teaching	15
Student at a U.S. college/school of theology	14
Congregational/formation/vocation ministry	13
Social services ministry	9
Contemplatives	5
Campus ministry	1
Some other response	3



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## What do these international sisters say to us?

As mentioned above, in addition to the rich data from the survey of international sisters, we also conducted 28 interviews or focus groups with 75 international sisters. Each interview or focus group lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and centered around these four basic questions: 1) Their experience of arriving in the United States, 2) The challenges they faced in living and working in the United States, 3) The contributions they make to religious life and ministry in the United States, and 4) Advice they have for future arrivals and those who would welcome them. We analyzed all that qualitative data and have distilled from it some important lessons that can help those who leave their homeland for mission as well as those who welcome them and seek to support them in their lives and ministries. Here are some of our findings, summarized by us and illustrated by the words of the sisters themselves.

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## Welcoming international sisters: culture shock or homecoming?

Although they may seem comparatively trivial, the daily practical problems in adjusting to the different food, weather, and language of their new home loom large in the experiences of the international sisters in the focus groups. By far the most common difficulty mentioned was with becoming comfortable with the language. One sister told us: “My problem was the English language. I could understand nothing. And I was worried about how long it would be like that. But after a few months, I just started catching the words and I started to understand the whole sentences. Of course, I went to community college. And every day, I went there to learn English”.

Even the sisters from countries where English was a common language found adjusting to American English difficult, whether because of the unfamiliar accent or the speed at which Americans speak. Said one sister: “So actually, we learned American English from the kids. And then when we spoke in English in the beginning, they asked us ‘are you speaking in Spanish?’. Actually, we spoke English in India as we learned it there. So they did not know the accent”. Another sister told us: “In my country, we don’t speak English. We speak English in school, but we don’t use it. We use our mother tongue, which is Swahili. So at first it was very hard for me to speak English. We spoke British English. And here it is American English”.

But the sisters also told us that surmounting this challenge was made easier by the sisters who welcomed them to the United States. Said one: “I thought I knew English. But when I came here, the difficulty was the diction was different and I was not understood. And I did not understand them. Luckily one sister was compassionate and said, ‘OK, every weekend, you come here and we will teach you’”. Another said: “The language is difficult – it’s still difficult sometimes, but the key is if you are open to learn new things, it’s always provided. And I did receive a lot of support from the community”.

Other practical difficulties involved adjusting to the food and the weather in the United States. One sister described it this way: “The most difficult thing I found when I came to the U.S. was the food, because I lived in the residence. And the food was hospital food. So the first two weeks, I ate green apples, so I lost a lot of pounds. I did not want the food except some corn in the hospital. That was the only thing I would eat”. Another told us: “That was the first time in my life I saw snow. It was in 1964, I had not seen snow in my whole life and I thought I would freeze to death”.

And it was not just the unfamiliar food that was a problem, but also unfamiliar customs involved in preparing and eating it: One sister told us: “Eating in the morning by myself, eating lunch by myself and seeing people only in the morning and evening was hard because it is very different than what we had at home. There, we prepared breakfast together and everybody would eat. Somebody would make the

food, somebody made the coffee and we prepared everything together and ate together. Lunch the same thing, dinner the same thing. So everybody, especially for meals, we worked together”.

For many, especially for those who had been sent to the United States alone to study, being so far from friends, family and the rest of their congregation meant that they had to deal with loneliness. For the sisters who came as a group sent to establish a house of their institute in this country, on the other hand, loneliness was less of a problem. One sister said: “When Mother asked me to go work in the U.S., it was hard to leave the country, the family, and the sisters. But I came here, we had five sisters here already, so seeing the five sisters here, I felt like I was with the sisters in my community. I had a very blessed experience coming here for the first time. And they treated me exactly like I was at my motherhouse back in India. So I did not feel much homesick the first time. But my family had so many struggles leaving me this far away”.

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## Satisfactions and challenges of life in the United States

Almost all of the international sisters reported to us in their survey responses that they were satisfied with their housing, food, health care, and transportation. They told us that they were satisfied with the support they receive from the sisters in their local house, from their institute, from their family, and from their diocese. One sister told us: “I was welcomed when I came to the United States. They tried to help me always. They gave me so much courage. They made me feel very good”. Another sister said: “When I came to the airport, I saw somebody holding up a sign saying, ‘Welcome Sister!’ They said, ‘We know that you are lonely and we are here for you. Just make yourself at home. And if you need anything, please let us know’. So I felt like I was at home”.

We learned though, particularly through the focus groups and interviews, that coming to live and work in another country brings with it many challenges, even in the best of circumstances. One sister told us how nervous she was in the face of all the strangeness she encountered. She said: “My self-confidence was not very high when I first entered the United States. I don’t know if it was connected to being in a new country. In my feelings, it was like, ‘I can’t do this right; I can’t do that right’”. Another told us: “I was very hopeful, very curious, and very ready, but I was also very afraid and skeptical. I don’t have any family members here. So I discovered that Nigeria is as big as just one state. And the U.S. has 51. Then I thought, ‘Oh my God, I will be like a drop of water in the ocean!’ So I would be lost. And I would be so insignificant. Where I come from, everybody knows each other. It is a community. But here, the complexity gave me the sense of being lost in this space, where nobody knows me. In addition, I was very lonely. I missed home. I had a lot of homesickness at the beginning. And I was afraid of doing the wrong thing. I didn’t want to be put in the spotlight, I didn’t want to do something to make people ask, ‘Where are you from?’”

Even in their ministry and in their spiritual life, the sisters related to us some of the challenges they faced in trying to fit into a new culture. Said one sister: “In my country, we sisters had a place that we called the chapel and it’s especially for prayer. You can go there to do your personal prayer and your community prayer. When I got here, we had to pray in the living room, and I said, ‘Where is the chapel?’ That was very hard for me to get used to”. Another told us: “In my country, we had a big group so you can share: you go into ministry and you share your ministry together. Nowadays, here, they do it differently, you are just alone. Maybe you are lucky and you have another companion but they live in another house and not close by”.

Similar misunderstandings arose concerning expectations about the spiritual life. One Mexican sister recounted how confused she had been when her American novice director asked her: “Who is God for you?” She said: “Why did she ask me this per-



sonal question? But later I understood that it was kind of sharing where I was in my spiritual life”.

Many times, these sisters tell us that they had difficulty adapting to different cultural assumptions, in their relationships with U.S. sisters as well as in their relationships with their sisters back home. As one sister noted: “We as Peruvians have this way of saying things. We are very straightforward and it can sound rude. As a simple example, I am short and everybody in Peru would call me something referring to my height, like ‘shorty’ or whatever, or another nickname and it was OK, but here you can’t call another person a nickname because it’s not polite. That’s the way we love each other over there”. Another sister told us of an unfortunate experience she observed in her community: “I think of the first Vietnamese sister that we had. She was coming to look at transferring into our community. I remember she had barely been there a week or two. And I remember she came over to me in tears. And what it was, she had picked up her bowl like this to eat her rice, soup, or whatever it was. And one of the American sisters slapped her hand, and said, ‘In our culture, we do not eat it that way’, and ‘It is rude’ and all that stuff”.

The biggest challenges for most of these international sisters are learning how to fit in, to feel comfortable in another culture. They have to learn to live and speak in another language, even if that means taking a step back to go back to school. One sister told us: “I had already finished college in my country, but when I arrived here I had to start everything over from square one. I had to go back to school to learn everything again, and the language is hard”. They are regularly misunderstood when they try to communicate, which can be humbling and humiliating. They make mistakes, even when they are trying very hard to fit in. Said one sister: “Well, one day when I was going to iron my skirt, somebody’s skirt was on the ironing board. So I ironed it and hung it up and then I ironed my skirt. And the sister came out from the shower. Out loud at 6:30 in the morning she said, ‘Who did my skirt?’ I said, ‘Good morning, Sister. I ironed it’. She yelled, ‘I can do it myself!’ I was really surprised that instead of saying thank you, you know, she was mad at me”.

Loneliness is a big challenge for these sisters, even though they are nearly all living in community. One sister told us: “I feel so alone because where I live, everybody goes to work and I am here by myself and I feel the loneliness. Loneliness is hard because the sisters here have their own lives – they are working or each one has their own space”. Another told us of her feeling of isolation in these words: “One thing is I don’t have my own community here. I am the only one that is here, so I live in a different community with sisters, and they are very nice so far. But I am so used to living with my own community of sisters because community life there is so much different from here and we are so community bonded in terms of prayer life and community life and apostolic life. So the community life is better there”.

Another very difficult challenge for international sisters, and one which we had not really anticipated, is how to maintain their involvement with their congregation back home and participate in the life of their institute. Nearly three in five told us that they are at least somewhat concerned about this. This is much more than simple loneliness, it has to do with a sense of responsibility to their sending community as well as a feeling of isolation or alienation from them. Said one sister: “I feel very responsible because, being alone, I have so much burden on my shoulders in terms of the ministry here. My leadership team has such high expectations for me and because I am here alone, I have to stay on track”. Another sister described her feelings of alienation from her congregation like this: “When we go back home, to meet our sisters at the motherhouse, for example, sometimes they don’t understand our different points of view on many things. Sometimes, I don’t tell everything I experience here because I don’t want to shock them”.

## Contributions of international sisters to life in the United States

But theirs is not a story only of difficulties encountered and challenges overcome. The international sisters are truly a blessing and a gift to the Church in the United States. They bring an international awareness to sisters in congregations who have been for too long inward-looking and culturally closed off. Said one sister: “I know one thing that I notice we international sisters bring to the United States: we bring an awareness of a new person coming to our congregation from another country, who needs a helping hand, needs someone to walk with them and tell them some of the things that we found out the hard way”. Another sister spoke of how having international sisters encouraged the U.S. sisters to learn a second language: “We were at an international gathering of sisters last month. There were Egyptians, Haitians, Cameroonians, Vietnamese, and Filipinos. Seven languages, can you imagine, at one table? It gives us more perseverance to learn another language, like I have English and Spanish, and some of the others, it’s amazing – some of them speak three or four languages!”.

The international sisters also bring a diversity in prayer and worship styles to the United States, which deepens and enriches the experience for all. One African sister described her experience in this way: “For example, like this being the South, we know that here you have a lot of descendants from Africa. We bring our culture to this place, like our dancing. Because in the Catholic Church the worship is the same around the world, but they can also learn different ways of dancing and so we add flavor to worship in terms of our dancing and our songs”. Another sister told us: “I do home health care, and the family that I work with are Catholics, but they don’t understand what the rosary is all about. I taught them the rosary. They are wonderful people because they always see me with my rosary. When I work there, I sit down and continue my rosary. They are happy now that they enjoy the rosary, so I gave them the rosary”.

Perhaps the greatest gift that the international sisters bring to the Church in the United States, though, is the gift of intercultural understanding. Said one sister: “I think the greatest contribution that the international sisters can make is their openness and their presence. Once people see them, they think to themselves: ‘Oh, we are not just Americans. Somebody else is here’. The international sisters are accepting the culture here at the same time that the people here are trying to learn our own culture, trying to fit in and make it beautiful”. Another sister explained it this way: “I think the richness of international sisters is not only for the community but also for the Church. I think the difference in the Church now is its diversity, and as a diverse group we offer different stages and so people might open different eyes to see; we see things in different ways. I think we give a lot of richness to the Church and to the community”. Finally, one sister described how the presence of sisters from Africa is making it possible for her congregation to thrive: “You see, my congregation is on the verge of revitalization at this point and I think that would not be happening without sisters coming from Africa to add to the sisters here, to our number, because we are not getting more vocations here from the United States, for my congregation. So I feel that the sisters coming from Africa are also contributing somehow to the congregation to go on, to move ahead”.

## Implications and recommendations from the research

We are particularly sensitive to the many and difficult challenges that international sisters, along with all newcomers to the United States, face in a new society and especially one as complex as this country. In the course of our research, we discovered that there is not just one story, there are many stories. Individual sisters told stories of dealing with spiritual and cultural differences – like different liturgical styles and different food and weather – and with emotional issues, especially loneliness. They spoke of problems with some U.S. born sisters and laity who did not always welcome

them and of problems with some religious superiors and clergy, sometimes from their home country. They had to adjust to a more individualistic society, with more bureaucracy, credentialing, and criminal background checks, even involving ministry, a startling change for some of them. They had to adjust to a pluralistic society of many religions and ethnic groups, to a huge Catholic Church with hundreds of dioceses and religious institutes and a variety of parish and diocesan cultures, and to a religious life of multiple ministries and charisms. In the midst of this, they share in the multiple political and social challenges facing the millions of immigrants in this country at this time. Thus, their collective identity is a complex one, and one that is too often hidden in plain sight. While the resiliency shown by the sisters is inspiring, the need for the Church and the people of the United States to grow in understanding about the challenges of migration is urgent. As Pope Francis reminded us in his visit to the United States in 2015, we are a nation of immigrants. We can also say that we have been and still are a Church of immigrants.

These international sisters in the United States are part of the complex migration patterns that circle the world at this time. While a century ago, many European sisters left their home countries to serve in the Americas, Asia and Africa, and while we know that today sisters in Asia, Africa and Latin America are sent to serve in North America and Europe, we also realize that the picture is more complex than a simple reversal of mission<sup>2</sup>. Sisters from the North and South cross paths, creating new patterns of international relationship and ministry that have the potential for even greater collaboration and effectiveness in ministry, and a renewed energy for the building up of religious life and the Church, in even greater service to the world.

While the primary focus of our research was on institutes and sisters, we learned of organizations, networks and structures that have been developed or are evolving in response to the needs and contributions of international sisters. More research needs to be done on the growth and development of organizations like these so that ideas can be exchanged as new needs emerge and solutions evolve. We wrote a book, *Migration for Mission*<sup>3</sup> that provides more details from these qualitative and quantitative data, along with more description of the networks and structures being developed by and for international sisters, in order to provide a more accurate understanding of the many dimensions of religious life in this country today. We recommend that book as a resource for those who are struggling to deal with diversity in religious life. We are grateful to the generosity and vision of GHR who funded the study, to all who supported us in our work, and, finally, to the witness of the extraordinary international sisters of today who follow in the long line of sisters across centuries and nations who left their home country to minister in a new land, for a short while or forever, for the sake of the Gospel.



## Endnotes

1. Cf. M.S. THOMPSON, *Cultural Conundrum: Sisters, Ethnicity, and the Adaptation of American Catholicism*, "Mid-America: An Historical Review" 74 (1992) 3, 205-230; G.C. STEWART, *Marvels of Charity*, Our Sunday Visitor Press, Huntington, IN 1994; P. WITTEBERG, *The Rise and Fall of Catholic Religious Orders: A Social Movement Perspective*, SUNY Press, Albany, NY 1994.
2. Cf. C.N. MBONU, *Reversed Missionary Action: Prospects and Challenges for African Women Religious*, "Religious Life Review" (2016) 217-228.
3. Cf. M. JOHNSON – M.L. GAUTIER – P. WITTEBERG – T.T. DO, *Migration for Mission: International Catholic Sisters in the United States*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY 2019.