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What is our call to action in regard to calling and forming competent, committed associate leadership? Our timeline for addressing this action item?

SHARING

What do we want to share with our congregational or associate leadership as a result of this conversation?

What do we want to share with the broader associate community/religious congregation?

What are we going to share with NACAR leadership?



It is the hope of NACAR leadership that this study guide has assisted associates, vowed religious, associate leadership and congregational leadership in exploring the findings of this extensive study. As religious life and the associate relationship evolve, the shared experience and wisdom of those involved in this new expression of traditional

charisms help us all facilitate its growth and sustainability. We close with these words from the study of both an associate and vowed religious:

“I am inspired and encouraged to enrich my personal, spiritual life and to strive to inspire others to deepen their baptismal commitment. I see the Associate movement as God’s way of calling more of us to carry out the Gospel message in a special way.” –associate

“As the number of religious has decreased, the associates bring new life, energy, ideas, and enthusiasm to us, and are a sign of hope to me that our spirit and charism will continue through them in new ways. Their thirst for our spirituality make me appreciate more the richness that we have and deepen my love for it” –vowed religious (SR, p.3).

We thank all associates, associate leaders and vowed religious who shared their insights and feedback through this important study. May it serve to inspire and inform our community life and collective ministry in the years to come.

Peace!

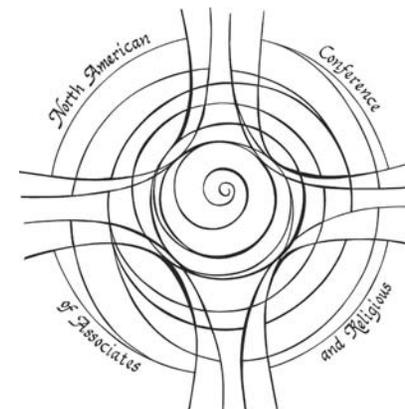
STUDY GUIDE

to accompany the
CARA Special Report



of the
Associate-Religious Relationship
in the
United States and Canada

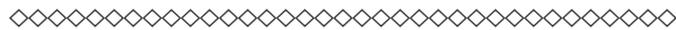
*Center for Applied Research in the
Apostolate 2015 commissioned
by NACAR*



The updated CARA study is rich with the results of hundreds of associate leaders and thousands of associates and vowed religious sharing their current understanding of the associate–religious relationship. They also shared their ideas about the associate—religious movement for the future. To reap the bounty of gifts in this research study, NACAR has provided this study guide. It will assist in delving into the results of the study, assessing our current associate communities in relationship to the broader associate movement, and creating ideas for moving our associate communities, and relationship with sponsoring religious institutes, into the future.



The study guide is for associate groups and/or leadership, congregational leadership teams, and groups of religious and/or associates, who want to reflect more deeply together on the findings of the CARA study. Reflecting on the study in relation to personal experience of the associate–religious relationship will be especially valuable. The questions for each topic are meant to provide a springboard for personal and communal reflection and responsive action from what has been gleaned from the study.



The full study will provide the most detailed data for discussion, but this study guide is designed to also be utilized in conjunction with the synopsis of the study provided by the special report and directors’ report, which are most often cited in this guide.

A recommended format for the use of this study guide is to ...

Gather and begin with a prayer asking the Holy Spirit’s guidance in navigating and interpreting the results of the study in relation to your own congregational experience.

Read. Take turns reading aloud particular excerpts of the results of a particular topic.

Leadership Development

The study indicated that “Three in four directors/coordinators of associates at least “somewhat” agree they have a path for associates to have more decision-making responsibilities with the associate community (73 percent). Two in three agree that new models of leadership have emerged for associates in the past five years (68 percent). Six in 10 directors/coordinators (62 percent) agree that the institute is exploring new models of associate leadership” (DR, p. 59).

Also, from the directors’ report: “*The most serious challenge that we are facing focuses on the level of commitment of the associates to be active participants in the transformation process. Another challenge that we face is the potential pool of future leaders for the associate leadership team*” (SR, p. 5).

Questions for Reflection and Group Process

Do the study results regarding associate leadership resonate with our own experience (congregational & associate leaders and/or associate groups) of associates stepping forward to lead?

Is there a connection between personal integration of the charism and willingness to participate in leadership?

What structures can we set in place to encourage greater ownership of associate leadership among the associates?

How can vowed religious encourage and facilitate associates stepping forward into leadership?

Questions for Reflection and Group Process

Do we resonate with these concerns (congregational leadership and associates)?

Is there resistance to the idea of financial independence among vowed religious and/or associates of our congregation? If so, what are the reasons?

What would moving toward greater financial sustainability look like for our associates?

Do we (congregational leadership; associates) feel that it would be beneficial for associates to have 100% financial independence? Why or why not?

What is our call to action in having courageous conversations about the state of associate financial sustainability? Our timeline for addressing this action item?

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Reflect and Discuss. Using the accompanying study guide questions, take time to reflect more deeply on how the study results in a particular area reflect your congregation's experience of the associate-religious relationship, and associate commitment. Share your own insights, suggestions and action plans in response to the findings of the study.



This is a time of both challenge and opportunity for associates and the associate-religious relationship. The new study results reflect both. We preface the study guide by two comments made by associate leaders in the directors' report. These highlight what lies before us as we embrace the present and prepare to step into the future:

“A serious challenge is building Associate identity and sense of mission, so that the Associates can continue to thrive into the future whether or not there are Sisters in their local areas to companion them.”

“[We need to develop the] ability to vision what the future of associate movement can and should be and what aspects of the religious institution/ congregation are essential in order to carry a meaningful relationship forward. This vision has to be the product of the congregation and associates discerning, visioning, and planning together” (DR, p.100).

So, let us begin unpacking the 2016 CARA study.

In citing text references, SR refers to the special report and DR refers to the directors' report.

Initial Conversation – General Reactions

Questions for Reflection and Group Process

After reviewing the study or special report, do you have any general response to the study results you have read regarding associates and the associate-religious relationship in North America?

What surprises you?

How does this report reflect your congregational/community experience? How does it not?

After seeing the study, what are three areas you would like to see NACAR focus on for the sake of the associate-religious relationship?

Community & Connections

Geography & Isolation

One in 10 associates and one in 10 directors/coordinators list distance as the biggest challenge to sustainability in the community (SR, p. 3).

“As one associate articulates, ‘I live in another state than the congregation is located. I am in touch via computer, phone, etc. What I find most rewarding is the sense of being connected spiritually and belief in the charism of our foundress. And the reality that we are working together to accomplish and carry out the Gospel message to love and care for one another.’ Even for those associates who gather with others locally, many find their overall community spread across a wide geographical area.”

What is our call to action in becoming associates who “carry the charism?” Our timeline for addressing this action item?

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Financial Sustainability

The study found that sustainability on a financial level is becoming an increasing concern for both associates and religious. “In 73 percent of the responding institutes, the institute covers most or all of the associate budget ... A tenth of directors/coordinators say one of the lessons they learned about the sustainability of the associates is that financial sustainability requires contributions from the associates” (SR, p.6).

A director/coordinator stated, *“Financial sustainability is key. We are currently being supported by the institute. This needs to change over time. We are working on ways to change this dynamic.”* Another director/coordinator expressed, *“Our community of associates is facing the very difficult task of establishing fiscal stability once the annual budget is no longer provided by the sisters.”*

The study indicated that both associates and vowed religious are neutral toward moving toward the goal of associate financial independence. One associate commented the concern that the associates are a drain on the congregation’s resources. A vowed religious expressed that a positive goal is for the religious and associates to remain *“independent personally and financially, yet having a very special connection with ministry and mission and prayer”* (SR, p. 6).

at meetings and reflecting the issues of the world to us, as well as assisting in areas of their expertise.”

Another vowed religious expressed this vision with a slightly different nuance:

“The love of the associates for the charism and mission is contagious. Their living of the charism questions us and calls us to be more fully alive in the spirit of our own Institute. Their relationship to the Founder and how they relate so deeply to his life puts us to shame. Their love for the poor (a dimension of our charism) is lived with real passion. The associates often bring us a new conversation and many of our men appreciate their presence at local community meetings, ongoing formation and retreats. We offer them formation and mission possibilities, but it seems we receive much more than we give” (SR, p. 5).

Questions for Reflection and Group Process

Do we relate more (congregation or associate leaders and/or associate groups) to the statement of the first or second vowed religious in terms of the role of associates in carrying the charism and participating in the mission?

Do the associates of our congregation feel that they share in carrying the charism as a gift they have received, or that it is the charism of the vowed religious whom they are assisting?

How can our associates be more mindfully and intentionally formed in the charism?

Questions for Reflection and Group Process

How can our community help fellow associates who live apart from the larger community feel connected? Do we have processes in place to maintain community connection?

How can we achieve long distance initial and/or ongoing formation?

Does our community utilize internet and social media resources to maintain connection with one another? Are there avenues we haven't tried that we might explore?

Are there ways to collaborate with regional groups, NACAR, and/or other associate groups to enhance the associate experience for geographically isolated associates?

What is our call to action in the area of geography and isolation? Our timeline for addressing this action item?

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Attracting New Associates

Relationship with vowed religious and other associates appears to be key in both inviting and sustaining associate commitment. One director/coordinator said,

“Involvement and interaction with the sisters and associates on a regular basis contributes significantly to the sustainability of the associates’ community. The leaders composing the associate leadership team, shared prayer, community celebrations, various workshops and sister-associate retreats create a oneness which aids in the sustainability of our associates” (SR, p. 4).

Augmenting these findings are that, of the associates who participate in inviting others to explore associate commitment, only 21 percent say very much and 33 percent somewhat. Forty-six percent of respondents said they invite others only a little or not at all (SR, p. 5).

Questions for Reflection and Group Process

Do these findings reflect our experience of relationship and connection between associates and religious?

Does our community (congregational leadership, associates) feel that our current level of interaction between vowed religious and associates is satisfactory?

(for vowed religious) How does relationship with the associates enhance our sense of commitment to the charism and mission of our congregation?

(for associates) How does relationship with the vowed religious enhance our sense of commitment to the charism and mission?

How rooted in the founding charism is both our initial and ongoing formation? Is this still a motivator for a majority of our associates?

How can the vowed religious of our congregation participate with associate leadership in developing charism and mission-centered initial and ongoing formation resources and process?

Does our initial formation process lead to a strong individual internalization of the charism and mission, able to be articulated at the time of first commitment?

What is our call to action in being attentive to our initial and ongoing formation processes? Our timeline for addressing this action item?

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Interpreting and Carrying the Charism

Three in four directors/coordinators affirmed that associates have a role in interpreting their congregation’s charism, and eight in 10 associates and vowed religious affirmed the same.

One vowed member shared in the study, “They (associates) can all carry on the charism of the community with their participation

What efforts might be taken to increase the racial/ethnic diversity of our associate membership?

What is our call to action in response to questions of diversity within our community/congregation? Our timeline for addressing this action item?

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Initial/Ongoing Spiritual Formation of Associates

The study found that what attracts associates to their institutes are a combination of a desire for a deeper spiritual life, the particular spirituality and mission of their institute and a desire to be of service (SR, p. 4). The spiritual tradition of the institute, and relationship with vowed religious and other associates, also continue to be influential in forming associates in an ongoing way.

“Casting a wide net toward more diversity and a willingness to take the time to be actively engaged in good formation will help attract and keep new associates,” commented one vowed member” (SR p. 4).

Questions for Reflection and Group Process

Are we investing in solid, innovative and continually-renewing formation materials? When was the last time we updated our materials and process?

How can associates build on relationships in their own lives as a springboard to invitation to associate commitment?

As vowed religious age and/or leave locales with associates groups, what is needed for these groups to continue and thrive? How can relationships with vowed religious remain an important aspect of the associate experience?

What is our call to action in the area of attracting new associates? Our timeline for addressing this action item?

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Demographics & Diversity

Aging of Associates & Religious

“When asked what they find most challenging about the future of the associate-religious relationship for their religious institute, associates, vowed religious and directors/coordinators of associates are most likely to mention the age of the associates and vowed religious as their greatest concern” (SR, p. 3).

Among associates, less than four percent are age 49 or younger. The average age in 2001 was 61, and in 2015 was 68 (SR p. 2). Inviting younger associates is important to the continuance and vitality of the associate movement. However, “despite the concern that attracting new members will be difficult, the associate population [regardless of age] has grown since 2000. Also, two-thirds of the associates report

they first became associates since 2000 while 36 percent report they became associates since 2010” (SR p. 3).

Questions for Reflection and Group Process

Does our community reflect the statistics regarding age of associates in the report?

How do we honor the presence and experience of our older associates, while creating community that is inviting to a younger generation?

What are some new and innovative ways we can begin inviting younger associates?

What are some of the challenges and opportunities of the present moment?

How can associates provide support in multiple ways to the growing number of aging sisters?

As vowed religious age and/or leave locales with associates groups, what is needed for these groups to continue and thrive? What adjustments can associates make to remain in close contact with aging vowed religious and homebound associates?

What is our call to action in response to the aging of our communities? Our timeline for addressing this action item?

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Race & Ethnicity of Associates

“Altogether, almost six in 10 associates are caucasian/white. ... Compared to 2000, associates are slightly more diverse. Among responding institutes that are comparable to 2000, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino(a) (7 percent in 2000 compared to 13 percent in 2015) and Asian/Pacific Islander (4 percent in 2000 compared to 8 percent in 2015) increased, while the percentage of caucasian/white associates decreased (84 percent in 2000 compared to 73 percent in 2015)” (DR, p. 25).

Questions for Reflection and Group Process

Are these statistics consistent with the racial/ethnic demographics of our associate group?

What benefits would an increase in both the diversity of age and race bring to our associate community?

Would we like to be more diverse ethnically, and is this realistic, geographically?