

## Number of new nuns in Britain trebles in five years

Forty-five British women entered convents in 2014, says Catholic church, compared with 15 in 2009. The figure of 45 new nuns nationally is the highest for 25 years.



The number of women in Britain choosing to become nuns has trebled over the last five years, according to the Catholic church.

Figures released on Thursday show that the number of women taking holy vows has reached a 25-year high, with 45 women doing so last year. Church officials claim the increase suggested there was a “gap in the market for meaning in our culture” that the religious life offered.

In 2004, only seven women opted to become nuns, but this has risen steadily over the past decade, the Catholic church said, to 15 in 2009 and 45 in 2014. According to church figures, 14 of those who entered convents this year were aged 30 or under.

Anna Rowlands, lecturer in Catholic studies at Durham University, said the figures showed a “humble increase” and suggested there was still an interest in religious life. “Some people have written the death note for religious life, particularly women’s religious life,” she said. “This shows there is still an attraction to it.”

Rowlands said women joining the church were keen to become part of a community that was committed to social issues. “In a really obvious sense, the women feel a religious calling to do so. On a more sociological level, these are women who have lived in the world and who find themselves in their

late 20s, 30s or 40s making a conscious and hard choice to enter religious life.

“These days we live fairly transient lives, many people end up single and living between communities. Often the religious orders these women are joining are connected with serving the needs of the poor.”

Theodora Hawksley, 29, who left her postdoctoral research in theology at Edinburgh University to join the Congregation of Jesus in January, said she was attracted to the freedom offered by religious life.

“I was drawn to it by wanting a greater freedom in being able to give myself to God and the world,” she said. “I don’t have to worry now about practical things like making a career for myself. I’m free to go where I’m needed and meet people at the margins.”

She said some of her friends were a “bit bewildered” when she revealed her plans, but most had been very supportive.

Although nuns often wear the traditional habit, Hawksley said her order tended to dress down, in T-shirts and jeans. “Unless you really knew what you were looking for, you wouldn’t know it was a nun,” she said.

Last year, Martina Purdy, a BBC Northern Ireland political reporter, quit her 25-year career in journalism to become a nun. She joined the Adoration Sisters last October. In a statement posted on her Twitter page explaining her decision, she said: “I know many people will not understand this decision. It is a decision I have not come to lightly, but it is one I make with love and great joy.”

Becoming a nun was a risk for younger women, according to Rowlands, who said that they were few in number and would be faced with the difficult task of continuing the tradition.

Fr Christopher Jamison, director of the Vocations Office of the Catholic church, said: “There is a gap in the market for meaning in our culture, and one of the ways in which women may find that meaning is through religious life.”

[\*see full article\*](#)

Rebecca Ratcliffe - The Guardian