



**The GIVEN Institute:**  
*Why Young Adulthood? Why Women? Why Now?*

## What is GIVEN?

The GIVEN Institute (“GIVEN”) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to activating the gifts of young adult women for the Church and the world.

We inspire and equip the next generation of female leaders to “receive the gift that they are; realize the gifts they’ve been given; and respond with the gift that only they can give.”

Through leadership training, faith formation, and dedicated mentoring, GIVEN forms women for mission and for life.

The GIVEN Institute is faithful to the Magisterium and entrusted to Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of the New Evangelization.

## What challenge does GIVEN address?

For some time, the Catholic Church has been bracing itself to confront one of its major challenges – the disaffiliation of its Millennial members. In 2015, the Pew Research Center reported that 35% of Millennials (19 million persons) identified as “nones,” or persons<sup>1</sup> with no religious affiliation. A significant number of the unaffiliated had previously identified as Catholic.

This phenomenon has an under-looked but important aspect to it – the disaffiliation of Millennial Catholic women.

According to a 2018 America Media/CARA study<sup>2</sup>:

- 17% of Millennial Catholic women attend Mass weekly;
- 36% of Millennial Catholic women pray daily;
- 13% of Millennial Catholic women have considered becoming a religious sister;
- 37% of Millennial Catholic women reported having been involved in a parish ministry.

These numbers are striking, and even more so when considering how critical women have been to the life and mission of the Church.

Catholic women have traditionally offered some of their most important contributions to society through the family. Because Millennials are increasingly delaying or foregoing marriage altogether, many Catholic women are finding themselves single without their choosing – for longer than desired or for good.<sup>3</sup>

According to a 2015 CARA study, eighty percent of lay ecclesial ministers – those involved in religious education, sacramental preparation, liturgy and/or music ministry, or general parish administration – were women, with a median age of 55.<sup>4</sup>

Religious sisters, who have played a significant role in religious education and service to the marginalized, have seen staggering declines since a peak in 1965.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center, Religion and Public Life, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” 2015.

<sup>2</sup> “Catholic Women in the United States: Beliefs, Practices, and Attitudes.” Mark M. Gray and Mary L. Gautier, The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate and America Media. 2018.

<sup>3</sup> One-in-Four Millennials in their 30s Are Unmoored from the Institution of Family,” Wendy Wang, Institute for Family Studies, September 27, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> “Lay Ecclesial Ministers in the United States,” The Center for Applied Research in the United States. February 2015.

<sup>5</sup> “Population Trends Among Religious Institutes of Women.” Erick Berrelleza, S.J., Mary L. Gautier, Mark M. Gray. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. 2014.

It is clear that one of the Church's most pressing needs to ensure its future sustainability and mission-effectiveness is an investment in young adult Catholic women.

### **Why young adulthood?**

- The demographic of “emerging adulthood” is rapidly growing, meaning that increasing numbers of young adults find themselves on an unclear path to adulthood. There is now often a decade between college graduation and a vocational commitment. This period is characterized by anxiety, intense identity-exploration, instability, transience, and delayed commitments.<sup>6</sup>
- The weakening of what were previously ubiquitous centers of communal support – parishes, neighborhoods, civic associations – in addition to the weakening of marriage bonds and an unstable economy -- have left young adults looking for adults who can help them understand and meet the expectations and demands of adulthood.<sup>7</sup>

### **Why women?**

- The Catholic Church is one of the only institutions that esteems the role women play in shaping civilization as mothers. This leadership role is one that is undervalued and under-supported in our culture.
- Women – both lay and consecrated - have long been at the helm of some of the Church's most critical work, including ministry, education, healthcare, and the provision of social services to the marginalized.
- Lay Catholic women – through a diversity of professions – have answered the call to be “leaven to the world” by working to ensure that both the economy and society treasure the family, protect the vulnerable, and keep the person at the heart of all of its enterprises.<sup>8</sup>

### **Why now?**

- The distinct phenomena of the disaffiliation of young adult women, an aging population of religious sisters, and a culture which undervalues marriage and family life will soon converge. From its earliest days, women have been the backbone of the life and mission of the Church. This is a critical time for the Church to inspire and equip the next generation of Catholic women leaders to put their gifts in service of the Gospel.

### **How does GIVEN address these challenges?**

Young adult Catholic women are an underserved though critical demographic marked by a search for identity, community, and purpose. GIVEN's programming is designed for women between the ages of 21-30, who are navigating a period of time between college graduation and vocational commitment or professional clarity.

There is a growing number of highly educated, talented young adult women who are looking to make this period of their lives fruitful and purposeful, who want to know that their gifts are needed. GIVEN will identify, equip, and position these women to find a meaningful path for this period, one which also opens up possibilities for their future and enables them to find ways to put their gifts in service to the Church and the common good.

---

<sup>6</sup> Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup>“Borders on Insanity, or Insanity on Borders.” Jack Fowler. National Review. 2018.

<sup>8</sup> In his 1995 *Letter to Women*, Pope John Paul II said, “Thank you, *women who work!* You are present and active in every area of life-social, economic, cultural, artistic and political. In this way you make an indispensable contribution to the growth of a culture which unites reason and feeling, to a model of life ever open to the sense of “mystery”, to the establishment of economic and political structures ever more worthy of humanity.”

GIVEN aims to fill a current gap in services to meet the needs of this demographic. Many excellent corporate leadership development programs do exist; however, growth in leadership is often framed as something in tension or at odds with other vocational responsibilities. There are many Catholic ministries and apostolates that provide faith formation to women, but few, if any, explicitly invest in their leadership development. And presently, there are no known national programs which pair up established Catholic women leaders with emerging ones in an effort to create an intentional mentoring network, one which guides women in their educational, professional, or vocational discernment and decision-making.

GIVEN will bring together these elements of leadership development, faith formation, and dedicated mentorship to provide a comprehensive and transformative personal investment in the lives of future Catholic women leaders.

## **Identity**

GIVEN will help young adult women who are trying to form their identity to find it in Jesus Christ, “who is the answer to the question posed by every human life.” GIVEN’s programming will directly propose that a woman’s fundamental identity is a beloved daughter of God. GIVEN will present the Church’s teaching on the dignity and vocation of women, with particular attention to their call to physical or spiritual motherhood. Programming will highlight the distinctive ways that women form their identity, address common wounds and vulnerabilities, and help participants to cultivate healthy relationships with themselves, others, and God.<sup>10</sup>

## **Community**

According to Christian Smith, the sociological factor which makes the biggest difference in the religious and spiritual lives of Catholic young people (after the example of parents) are relationships with models, mentors, teachers, and friends who are serious about the Catholic faith.<sup>11</sup> GIVEN will provide young adult women with an encouraging community of dedicated mentors and a network of peers who share their faith commitments and desire to lead a meaningful life.

## **Purpose**

GIVEN will introduce and/or reinforce the truth expressed by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI: “Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know what life is. We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.”<sup>12</sup> The GIVEN network will collectively help young adult women better understand their gifts and identify opportunities and pathways to put them in the service of the Gospel.

## **How does GIVEN do this?**

---

<sup>9</sup> Pope Saint John Paul II, Homily, Apostolic Journey to the United States, October 8, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Contemporary Catholic women face new questions about their identity which previous generations did not have to confront. For example, a growing number of Catholic women are finding themselves single but desiring marriage. They have questions about their place in the Church and how to live out their vocation to motherhood. Many young adult women who are married have to balance the responsibilities of family life with the need to contribute to their family’s financial stability. Other married women feel vocational calls inside and outside of the home and are looking for help in integrating these desires. Because Millennials are marrying later, many women who set aside professional and educational pursuits for family life and wrestle with questions about their identity. Lastly, vocations directors report that young women who are entering religious communities are affected by the anxiety, instability, and concerns about commitment which effect their peers which can affect their transition and discernment. The Church must acknowledge these new realities and accompany young women as they navigate them.

<sup>11</sup> Christian Smith, Kyle Longest, Jonathan Hill, and Kari Christoffersen. *Young Catholic America: Emerging Adults In, Out of, and Gone from the Church*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, Inaugural Mass of Petrine Ministry, April 24, 2005

GIVEN addresses this current challenge through its two signature programs and its wider network.

## **GIVEN Catholic Young Women's Leadership Forum**

The flagship event of the GIVEN Institute is the Catholic Young Women's Leadership Forum. The annual event will bring together a diverse group of young adult women from across the country for a multi-day forum. It is designed for young adult Catholic women seeking leadership training, faith formation, and support to better understand and pursue their particular mission and/or vocation. Applicants are expected to be engaged with their Catholic faith but will come with different experiences and from diverse backgrounds. Each participant will develop and execute a post-forum action plan in which they share their gifts with a particular community. This will multiply GIVEN's reach beyond each cohort of women.

Participants will apply for a specific specialty:

- **Entrepreneurial:** This specialty is designed for young women who have an innovative idea for a new mission, organization, or apostolate. These young women will be guided by established leaders with business acumen and entrepreneurial experience who will support them as they develop their ideas, solidify their plans, and strategize for launch.
- **Post-Service:** This specialty is designed for young women who have spent one to three years in service as a missionary, a member of the military, a volunteer in a service corps, or in religious life and desire guidance in discovering God's will for their next steps. These young women will be paired with mentors who have extensive service experience and are equipped to support them in transitioning confidently to future endeavors using the gifts and skills they have developed in their years of service.
- **Catholic Professional:** This specialty is for women who are working within Catholic organizations (e.g. diocesan employees, youth/young adult/campus ministers, educators, non-profit employees) who would like to grow as leaders in their fields. Specific attention will be paid to the challenges and opportunities of working in non-profit and faith-based organizations. They will be mentored by experienced Catholic professionals who lead a variety of Church and non-profit ministries.
- **Secular Professional:** This specialty is designed for Catholic women called to a secular workplace or to the public square (e.g. business, finance/accounting, law, sports management/coaching, small business owner, educational leadership, government/public policy, journalist) who desire support as they integrate faith and professional life, navigate secular controversies with faith, and grow as a Catholic and a leader in the secular world. They will be mentored by Catholic professionals and executives who work in a diversity of fields.
- **Artistic:** This specialty is designed for women who are creative at heart and have a strong desire to use their gifts in the service of others. Whether a dancer, musician, painter, content creator, writer, or graphic designer, this specialty supports the unique calling and challenges of bringing the good, true, and beautiful to our world and Church. Mentors in this specialty are all experienced artists with varied gifts who will guide, challenge, and support the work of the artist.
- **Care for the Human Person:** A particular gift of the feminine genius is to nurture life, to care for the other. Although all women are called to nurture life in all vocations and professions, this specialty is designed for women who serve in direct roles caring for the human person. Those in the medical field, such as doctors and nurses, and other healing fields, such as counselors, life-coaches,

and psychiatrists, as well as those who serve as primary caregivers of children or the elderly will be supported in this group. Mentors who have made caring for the human person their life's work will serve to inspire and further equip the young leaders who share this calling and will particularly guide them to participate in the Church's rich tradition of social teaching and ethics.

No matter the specialty, every participant will:

- Hear keynote addresses and panel discussions from lay and religious Catholic leaders on topics relevant to the contemporary, Catholic woman
- Engage in exercises to identify her particular gifts, strengths, and aptitudes
- Engage in peer and professional networking
- Receive spiritual accompaniment from religious sisters
- Receive support and guidance to execute a one-year, post-forum action plan
- Deepen her understanding of the Church's teaching on the dignity of women, the vocation to marriage and motherhood, and the lived, spiritual maternity of religious sisters
- Have time for prayer, reflection, and renewal in their love of God, self, and neighbor. Mass, confession, adoration, and spiritual direction will be available throughout the Forum.

GIVEN will work to attract and serve a proportionate representation of Latina women in order to reflect the shifting demographic of young Catholics in the United States. Latina speakers, panelists, and mentors will be included in each forum and will serve as mentors. Presently, we will integrate all participants based on the specialty they desire to apply for. We also seek to support women from under-represented populations who might not otherwise have opportunities for such programming.

Members of religious communities who have recently assumed positions of leadership or for whom the programming and networking would be beneficial are welcome to participate in the forum. GIVEN aims to provide religious communities with opportunities for leadership development as well as new avenues to introduce their charisms to a wide network of young women and leading professionals.

### **The Art of Accompaniment Mentoring Program**

The GIVEN Institute has developed a signature mentoring program available to women who have participated in a Leadership Forum and will eventually expand to all members of The GIVEN Network. Catholic young adult women report that they primarily learn what it means to be an adult woman of faith through the witness of other women.<sup>13</sup> Research also confirms that in the absence of faith formation by their parents, many young adults have taken up the search for credible mentors outside of their families. For those well-formed at home, mentors reinforce faith commitments and broaden an understanding of vocational paths and opportunities.

The GIVEN Institute recruits and trains a network of Catholic women mentors who want to accompany young Catholic women to activate their gifts for the Gospel. Particular attention will be paid to the ways that women integrate faith, interpersonal relationships, professional aspirations, and vocational responsibilities.

The mentoring program will have three distinct but related components:

1. **Mentoring through the Forum:** There are two components to this part of GIVEN's mentoring program. A lay woman and a consecrated religious woman are assigned a small group to lead as mentors through the Forum, and after the Forum, each mentor works with young women one-on-one for one year to support them as they implement their Action Plans. The Action Plan is each young woman's initiative to activate her

---

<sup>13</sup> America Media/CARA survey.

gifts in her own community for the Church and the world. All of our mentors are faithful Catholics and experienced leaders. They are eager to help the next generation of Catholic female leaders develop their gifts and succeed in their vocations.

2. **Mentoring through GIVEN Academy:** Mentors work with The GIVEN Institute staff to produce virtual and in-person training sessions for ongoing formation of Forum alumnae. The sessions will extend the exploration of topics covered at the Forum, develop various professional skills, and ultimately, fill the Church with vibrant, effective female leaders.
3. **Mentoring through The GIVEN Network:** The Network is a vibrant, growing community of female leaders. As such, we recognize that there are many Catholic women who desire to be part of our mission but who cannot come to the Forum. Potential mentors and faith leaders are encouraged to contact us about regional events, small group Discover the Gift studies, virtual engagement, and potential one-time mentoring connections.

### **Sustaining the GIVEN Network:**

The leadership forum and the mentoring program will generate a diverse community of faithful women who have a shared heart for putting their gifts in service to the Gospel. One significant fruit will be a network of women who support one another through prayer and works of mercy. We imagine that this community will also develop into a type of “Catholic Women’s LinkedIn,” in which Catholic women can connect with one another about work, ministry, service, or opportunities for collaboration and resource-sharing. GIVEN will help to support and sustain the network in several ways:

- Bringing together new and past participants at the annual leadership forum and involve alumnae in the process and programming of each one;
- Providing online resources to maintain connection for key stakeholders;
- Hosting regional "GIVEN gatherings," which will bring together members of the GIVEN network centered around celebrating the gifts of members of the GIVEN network as a way to recruit applicants, mentors, supporters, and broaden GIVEN's visibility. They will also highlight the work of speakers and mentors, introduce participant action plans, and increase the visibility of religious orders to a larger network.

### **What has GIVEN’s impact been?**

#### **2016 Forum Overview:**

The GIVEN Institute, Inc. (“GIVEN”) was incorporated on February 9, 2018, but its history began in June 2016, when nearly three hundred young adult Catholic women gathered in Washington, D.C., for a first-of-its-kind leadership and faith formation summit. The five-day event, developed by the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, was a response to the consistent call from the last three popes for a better appreciation and activation of the gifts of women for the Church and the world. The premise was simple: invite young adult women of faith to “receive the gift that they are, recognize the gifts they’ve been given, and respond with the gift that only they can give.”.

The forum brought some of the Church’s most prominent lay and consecrated female leaders, including Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, S.V., Helen Alvaré, Dr. Carolyn Woo, and Sister Norma Pimentel, among others, in contact with the next generation of young adult Catholic women. In addition to hearing keynote addresses, participants received mentoring and spiritual guidance from more than 75 religious sisters, had ample networking opportunities, and were guided in the development and execution of an Action Plan in their local communities during the year

following the forum. The participating religious sisters and speakers played a critical role in helping young women to identify their gifts and find communities in need of them.

Participants' action plans included:

- Volunteering with immigrants at the Humanitarian Respite Center in McAllen, Texas with Sister Norma Pimentel. This participant went on to pursue a graduate degree in social work in order to return to serve the migrant population she encountered. She now works as Sister Norma's assistant.
- Creation of a website called The Catholic Woman, which was aimed at "[moving] away from reductive stereotypes of Catholic women and instead to speak of them as the unique persons they are." It now reaches 24,000 people.
- Launching a day-long retreat in Kansas City to celebrate women's dignity and vocation. This event has become an annual retreat in the Archdiocese of Kansas City with the approval of the archbishop.

The fruits of the first leadership forum continue in local communities, in the "digital highways," and in the peripheries where Pope Francis has encouraged the Church to be missionaries.

### **2016 Forum Alumnae:**

In June of 2018, participants of the 2016 Forum were asked to respond to a survey about their experience during and after the event. Highlights of the survey:

- 5 women applied to enter religious life after attending GIVEN
- Nearly 90% of respondents said that the programming from the forum was still relevant to them two years later
- 70% reported that GIVEN influenced their educational and professional pursuits
- 85% said that GIVEN was helpful in discerning/living their current state of life
- More than 80% stay in contact with members of the GIVEN network
- 100% of respondents would recommend the leadership forum to a friend

Alumnae of the 2016 GIVEN Forum - single, married and religious - put their gifts in service to the Gospel as:

Lawyers	Journalists
Medical professionals	Youth Ministers
NASA researchers	Pro-life leaders
Dieticians	Musicians
Behavioral therapists	Entrepreneurs
Campus ministers	Artists
Catechists	Social Workers

### **Testimonies:**

"There were so many examples of women in the Church living vibrantly through different vocations. As a single woman with a career in business, being present at GIVEN opened my eyes to see that God can do anything with your "Yes" if you give it to Him."

"I had been discerning a vocation to the religious life for a few years before attending GIVEN, and although not expecting it at all, it was at GIVEN that God clearly called me to Himself. I went to the forum simply looking for leadership skills and networking opportunities with other Catholic women, and I left joyfully accepting God's call to be totally His. I am now applying to a religious order!"

“GIVEN helped me to reexamine what I always felt was a tension between the vocation of a wife and mother with professional aspirations. It helped me to understand better the many fruitful ways that women live out their vocations in an integrated way.”

### **2019 Forum Overview:**

In June of 2019, the second GIVEN Forum took place in Washington D.C. This five day event is designed for young adult Catholic women between the ages of 21-30 who are seeking to better understand and pursue their particular mission and/or vocation. During the 2019 GIVEN Forum, attendees came from 30 states, Ireland, and Canada, proudly representing diverse backgrounds. The 120 attendees were paired with lay mentors and religious sisters who met with them in small groups to discuss their proposed Action Plans in the midst of the trainings and workshops. The 25 lay mentors, single and married women, shared their expertise in many sectors of society such as business, publishing, education, law, medicine, and athletics. The 50 religious sisters in attendance hailed from 13 different communities and many included novices still in formation. The attendees spent considerable time alongside the lay mentors and religious sisters by sharing meals, attending Mass and adoration, and enjoying recreational activities during break times. Highlights from the 2019 GIVEN Forum can be found at [giveninstitute.com/2019-given-forum-highlights/](http://giveninstitute.com/2019-given-forum-highlights/).

In the Spring of 2020, participants of the 2019 Forum were asked to respond to a survey about their experience during and after the event. Highlights of the survey:

- 3 women applied to enter religious life after attending GIVEN
- Nearly 99% of respondents said that the programming from the forum was still relevant to them
- 86% reported that GIVEN influenced their educational and professional pursuits
- 92% said that GIVEN was helpful in discerning/living their current state of life
- More than 82% stay in contact with members of the GIVEN network
- 100% of respondents would recommend the leadership forum to a friend

Alumnae of the 2019 GIVEN Forum - single, married and religious - put their gifts in service to the Gospel as:

Accountants	Geneticists
Book Editors	Non-Profit Managers
Campus Ministers	Physicians
College Professors	Professional Singers
Dance Instructors	Psychotherapists
Data Analysts	Registered Nurses
Development Directors	Special Education Teachers
Digital Media Specialists	Sports Coaches
Faith Formation Coordinators	Youth and Young Adult Ministers

### **Testimonies:**

“To have been in an environment where my entire self was loved, not just my spiritual self, not just my professional self, etc., but my whole life was ministered to at the GIVEN Forum and I will always be grateful for this.”

“You’ve helped me to know more fully who I am and how to live and love as a woman of God!”

“This is NOT like other ‘retreats’ where you come down off the spiritual high of the mountaintop and it fades into the background - with GIVEN you are walking back down the mountain with an army of sisters who will all help each other work in the vineyards down below.”

“The talks have made a deep impression on me and continue to pop up in my prayer. I am immensely grateful to be a part of the GIVEN network. I get to connect with this powerhouse of Catholic women.”

### **What are GIVEN’s short-term goals?**

By December 31, 2020 GIVEN aims to:

- Host a third Leadership Forum for a cohort of 100-150 young adult women who have a heart for mission and an aptitude for leadership and equip them to advance in their professional or vocational paths.
- Support forum participants in the development and execution of a post-forum action plan that will yield measurable impact within a particular community and utilize their unique gifts and talents. The impact will be shared in media outlets and with GIVEN supporters through communications campaigns and Action Plan Witness Talks called “This is my Gift”.
- Recruit and train additional, diverse established Catholic leaders who will be paired up with the next cohort of participants in the Art of Accompaniment Mentoring Program.
- Provide more religious communities with an opportunity at the forum to increase their visibility with established and emerging Church leaders who will collaborate with them in their ministries.
- Host an Alumnae networking event at the Forum that awards top Action Plans as well as engaging these emerging leaders with the 2020 cohort of young adult women for a wider support network.
- Launch the first year of GIVEN Gatherings globally to increase awareness of the mission as well as meeting the needs of women in local arenas.

### **What are GIVEN’s long-term goals?**

- We expect that participation in Leadership Forums and the Art of Accompaniment Mentoring Program will become highly sought-after opportunities for our targeted demographic and will attract top-tier candidates who will be well-positioned to have an impact as leaders in their field. We expect to see application numbers grow as well as participation in the GIVEN Network through regional events and online programming.
- We anticipate that hosting annual leadership forums, building up the dedicated mentoring network, and launching GIVEN Gatherings will help to foster a steady, incisive presence of faithful, skilled women - both lay and religious - in positions of leadership within the Church and professions aimed at the common good. We expect to see GIVEN’s impact in 10-13 dioceses within the first five years.
- We expect that GIVEN will become a leading organization that supports the work of religious sisters in the United States. GIVEN aims to inspire young women to enter religious life by exposing them to diverse religious communities at annual forums. GIVEN will also provide regular leadership development opportunities for religious sisters and provide communities with high-impact networking opportunities for their sustainability.

### **How will GIVEN measure success?**

The GIVEN Institute will measure success by:

- Regularly evaluating programming by forum participants and conducting market research

- Post-forum surveying (short and long-term) of how GIVEN affected vocational commitments and decision-making
- Tracking numbers of applicants for forum and mentoring and quality of applications
- Tracking numbers of women who serve as mentors and their evaluation of process, training, program
- Tracking numbers of alumnae who give back to GIVEN with time, talent, treasure
- Tracking number of GIVEN Gathering requests and the geographical stretch of GIVEN programming
- Evaluating effectiveness and execution of participant action plans
- Interest by dioceses, Catholic organizations, and others in engaging or employing GIVEN alumnae
- Tracking impact via social media platforms, online content, and ongoing formation opportunities