

## **Integration into the Local Community by Catholic Migrants through Religious Participation in Hanoi, Vietnam**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*With the substantial flow of people from rural to urban areas in recent years, especially in the capital city of Hanoi, Vietnam, migration has become a topic of interest to many experts. This study aims to explore the religious practices of Catholic migrants who come to Hanoi to study and work. The study involved a survey of 402 Catholic migrants as well as 12 in-depth interviews and two focus groups held in parishes where migrants participate in religious activities. The findings indicate that Catholic migrants actively engage in religious practices such as prayer, attending solemn Sunday Masses, and receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Women were found to participate in solemn Masses more frequently than men, and those with higher levels of education attend Sunday Mass more often than those with lower levels of education, as revealed by Chi-Square Test results. Other religious activities among Catholic migrants include receiving the Eucharist and joining associations of immigrants and native-born people, which make up more than 50 percent of their religious participation. Although a small percentage of migrants participate in additional activities such as fasting, retreats, and pilgrimages, the number of pilgrims has increased since 2015 due to improved family finances. The study suggests that participating in religious activities can provide valuable opportunities for migrants to integrate into society and settle into their new homes. By participating in religious activities in local parishes, migrants can connect with local people and other migrants, forming a network that can help them access better employment, career, education, and information.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Numerous research conducted globally demonstrates that becoming a member of a religion is a requirement to be religious. According to several studies such as those carried out by Bainbridge (1989), Lipford et al. (1993), and Evans et al. (1995), engagement in religion lowers crime rates. Many qualitative studies, such as those by Dolan (1972), Min (1992), George (1998), and Zhou et al. (2002) describe the economic and social benefits of belonging to a religious group; yet, religious participation can lower income levels and vice versa (Lipford et al. 2003), which will improve security, safety, comfort, hope, and meaning (Johnson and Larson 1997; Kerley et al. 2005). According to specific research, women are more involved in religious activities than men are (Jang and Johnson 2005). Hirsman and Charles (2004) identified the three Rs: ‘refuge,’ ‘respect,’ and ‘resources’ as reasons migrants engage in religious activities which bring immigrants respect and dignity. Joining a religion enables individuals to carry out their religious obligations, forges close bonds with others, offers stability, instills hope, and cultivates polite behavior that makes them feel appreciated and relieves stress (Eryilmaz 2015).

The Catholic Church has become increasingly concerned about the way in which Catholic migrants practice their religion. As a response, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam (CBCV) established the Committee for Migrants, a formal committee of the CBCV since 2007. The committee comprises migrant priests from local dioceses who have been appointed to address the needs of the migrant community. To further support migrant pastoral care, the CBCV developed the Pastoral Guidelines for Migrants in 2010. The main tenets of Church teachings on migrant pastoral care are outlined in this booklet. These tenets cover the spiritual life of migrant believers, the priest’s responsibilities to migrant believers, and marriage ministry. The publication also offers recommendations on how clergy, laypeople, and religious organizations might collaborate to meet the pastoral care requirements of migrants.

According to Canon Law on domicile and quasi-domicile, an immigrant “belongs to the parish in which he resides” (Migrant Pastoral Commission 2017). The Church also emphasizes the role of priests at both the point of departure and arrival. The priest at the destination “should be mindful of immigrants in his district and call on parishioners to cooperate in the care of the immigrant faithful so that not a single believer who has been abandoned for no apparent reason,” while the priest at the place of departure “should guide and help his parishioners know and carry out the necessary procedures when moving to help them easily integrate and practice the faith life in the new place” (Migrant Pastoral Commission 2017).

Does the retention of Catholic migrants’ religious participation change as they leave their familiar communities to join a new one? According to the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam, migration impacts both the place of origin and the place of residence. For example, many rural parishes no longer have human resources for community activities. In contrast, the pastoral workload at many of the city’s churches is excessive. Catholic migrants also expect priests, religious, and laypeople to provide them with care once they arrive. They will undoubtedly integrate into the parish where they live more quickly and be able to actively contribute to its development if they are given sufficient attention. On the other hand, their participation will be much less, and they may not even contribute to the building and growth of the nation if they are not given attention or are treated with apathy, indifference, or stigmatization (Migrant Pastoral Commission 2017).

Religious activities mean the expression of religious beliefs, the practice of doctrines, canon laws, and religious rituals (Clause 10, Article 2, Law on Belief and Religion in Vietnam 2016). How frequently people participate in religious services will reveal their level of religious participation. For migrants, belonging to a religious community enhances their dignity and self-worth (Connor 2009). For this study, religious activities were defined as the practice of religious rites under the doctrine and canon law, as well as participation in association activities in the destination parish. This essay aims to give insight on the religious involvement and practices of migratory Catholics. Catholic migrants can interact and build relationships with both locals and migrants by

participating in religious events, which ultimately helps them integrate into the community.

## **2. Methodology**

The author is the principal investigator of a project funded by the Nafosted Foundation (code 504.01-2019.01) with the topic: “Characteristics and changes in religious activities of Catholic migrants in the urbanization process in Vietnam today.” The author received approval from the leader of the research topic to utilize the quantitative and qualitative data from the Nafsted project survey. The sample included 402 Catholic migrants in Hanoi, as well as in-depth interviews with 12 Catholic migrants and information gathered from two focus group discussions in Trung Tri Parish of Hanoi Archdiocese. All data were gathered by the author between December 2019 and October 2021. The two focus group discussions had distinct characteristics. The first group comprised migrants who moved to Trung Tri Parish solely for religious activities, while the second group included various participants, such as three migrant priests, six leaders of migrant groups, the head and assistant head of the parish council of Trung Tri Church, and some migrant parishioners. The duration of the two focus group discussions was between 90 and 120 minutes. The author conducted the in-depth interviews, which lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, with about two-thirds of the Catholic migrants. The sample included migrants residing in Thai Ha and Co Nhue parishes, which are two parishes with a high concentration of migrants and many associations for migrants living far from home.

## **3. Results**

### ***a) The ritual practice of Catholic migrants***

Ritual observance is crucial for Catholics in order to maintain and practice their religion. Religion also plays a crucial function as a resource for immigrants in host societies (Hoang et al. 2021). According to several surveys, migrants identified as Catholic participate in parish

activities and engage in religious activities (Nguyen 2018; Hoang and Nguyen 2019). Based on these studies, it can be concluded that religious participation generates social capital, which in turn helps facilitate the integration of migrants into their new society. Through attending religious services and engaging in parish activities, migrants have the opportunity to build connections with fellow parishioners, priests, and other religious figures, as well as with non-migrants and individuals who have previously migrated. They can interact with a variety of people through Mass, church events, and sacraments, including those from their homeland and non-immigrants, building a support network for several facets of their lives, including their careers.

Pope Francis, the leader of the Catholic Church, discussed the importance of oral prayer during his catechesis on the morning of April 21, 2021. He emphasized that these were the only phrases that would bring us to God and were the only words he deserved to hear. “Prayer is interaction with God; For man, prayer becomes a word, an invocation, a song, or a poem,” the Pope declared at the start of his catechesis (Pope Francis 2020).

**Table 1: Level of participation in prayer**

| Participation level            | (%)  |
|--------------------------------|------|
| From 1 to many times/day       | 54.9 |
| From 1 to several times/week   | 36.5 |
| From 1 to several times/ month | 7.1  |
| Never                          | 1.5  |

*Source: Calculated from the survey funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (grant number 504.01-2019.01)*

Based on the survey results, a majority of migrants, 54.9 percent, continue to pray regularly, ranging from once a day to many times a day. Another 36.5 percent pray between once and several times per week. Only 7.1 percent of migrants pray occasionally, and a mere 1.5 percent never pray. These findings indicate that despite the necessity of earning a living and supporting their families after relocating to Hanoi, migrants still make time to pray regularly. Additionally, prayer provides migrants

with a simple way to overcome the initial difficulties of adjusting to a new environment. Once they have settled in, migrants can turn to their religion to help them cope with any challenges they may face (Warner 2000).

**Table 2: Frequency of prayer when faced with important life problems**

| Prayer level |      | (%) |
|--------------|------|-----|
| Often        | 85.8 |     |
| Sometimes    | 13.2 |     |
| Never        | 1.0  |     |

*Source: Calculated from the survey funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (grant number 504.01-2019.01)*

Catholic migrants demonstrate a profound faith in God, which is evident in their regular engagement in individual or group prayer. This practice fosters spiritual well-being and gives them the confidence to overcome challenges and anxieties in their life as migrants. In addition to their daily prayer routine, most migrants (85.8 percent) also resort to prayer when confronted with significant issues in life.

### ***b) Attending Sunday Mass and Solemnities***

The faithful is required to attend Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation, according to Canon 1247 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church. In addition, the first of the “Six Commandments of the Church” mandates one to “Attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation.”

**Table 3: Participation of Migrants in Sunday Mass and Solemnities**

| Mass        | Level of attendance       | (%)  |
|-------------|---------------------------|------|
| Sunday Mass | At least once a week      | 69.4 |
|             | One to three months/ time | 27.0 |
|             | Several times/ year       | 3.3  |
|             | Never                     | 0.3  |

|             |                                |      |
|-------------|--------------------------------|------|
| Solemnities | Attend all Masses              | 68.4 |
|             | Missing from one to two Masses | 25.6 |
|             | Missing more than two Masses   | 5.3  |
|             | Never                          | 0.8  |

*Source: Calculated from the survey funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (grant number 504.01-2019.01)*

According to the survey data, 68.4 percent of migrants fully attend solemnities, and 69.4 percent of migrants attend Sunday Mass at least once a week, which is a high rate. However, it is important to note that according to the 1983 Code of Canon Law, Catholics are required to attend Sunday Mass and solemnities. More than 30 percent of Catholics surveyed do not fulfill this obligation. This failure to adhere to the law can be a barrier to being integrated into the religious community and may lead to a gradual disengagement from participating in the sacraments.

**Table 4: Relationship between Sunday Mass attendance and educational level**

| <b>Educational level</b><br>(df= 2; Value = 12.164 <sup>a</sup> , p =0,002) | <b>Sunday Mass attendance</b><br><b>(At least once a week)</b><br><b>(%)</b> |
|---|--|
| No training, intermediate vocational level                                  | 26.2   |
| Professional high school, college   | 35.3   |
| University, postgraduate  | 38.5   |

*Source: Calculated from the survey funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (grant number 504.01-2019.01)*

The study's findings indicate that the educational and professional backgrounds of migrants are related to how frequently they attend Mass on Sundays. The Chi-Square Test reveals that migrants with university and postgraduate degrees in technical fields are more likely to participate in Sunday Mass than migrants with less education. Additionally, this study demonstrates that with 38.5 percent participation, the rate of

Sunday Mass attendance increases with the increase in professional level.

**Table 5: Relationship between the level of solemnity attendance and gender**

|  | Gender   |            |
|--|----------|------------|
|  | Male (%) | Female (%) |
| Attend all solemn Masses<br>(df= 3, Value =8.750 <sup>a</sup> , p = 0,033) | 62.2     | 73.2       |

*Source: Calculated from the survey funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (grant number 504.01-2019.01)*

The survey results in the above table demonstrate a correlation between gender and degree of participation in solemnity. The Chi-Square Test reveals that the proportion of women attending all solemn Masses is 73.2 percent, 10 percent higher than the rate of men. This percentage represents a statistical significance. This may be seen in the fact that, with the exception of the sports group, most associations have more women than men. By participating in these associations, female migrants are encouraged and invited to attend Mass by other immigrants or natives who joined the groups before them (Table 6). The fact that more women than males participate in parish associations is a cause for concern.

**Table 6: Relationship between participation in Catholic groups and gender**

| No | Catholic Action Groups   | Male (%) | Female (%) |
|----|--|----------|------------|
| 1  | Groups relating to liturgical activities (choir, trumpet team, offerings, prayer, etc.) (N=82) | 39.0     | 61.0       |
| 2  | Charity Associations (N=55)  | 47.3     | 52.7       |
| 3  | Groups relating to communication activities (N=18)   | 61.1     | 38.9       |



|   |  |      |      |
|---|--|------|------|
| 4 | Service Groups (flower arrangement, cleaning, altar decoration) (N=20) | 25.0 | 75.0 |
| 5 | Educational Groups (students, catechist, parents) (N=46)               | 34.8 | 65.2 |
| 6 | Group related to media activities (N=16)                               | 37.5 | 62.5 |
| 7 | Catholic Association of fellow-countrymen (N=119)                      | 41.2 | 58.8 |
| 8 | Group of Catholic Migrants (N=90)                                      | 36.7 | 63.3 |
| 9 | Other Catholic Groups (N=12)   | 33.3 | 66.7 |

*Source: Calculated from the survey funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (grant number 504.01-2019.01)*

### ***c) Receiving the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Reconciliation***

For Catholics, the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation are essential components of their spiritual lives. According to Canon 920 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church, all the faithful are obliged to receive Communion at least once a year after their first Communion unless they have a valid reason not to. If a believer has not received Communion throughout the year, they are required to do so during the Easter Season.

**Table 7: Level of receiving the Eucharist**

| <b>Participation</b>         | <b>(%)</b> |
|------------------------------|------------|
| More than once a week        | 22.7       |
| One week/time                | 38.0       |
| One to three times/per month | 13.6       |
| Several times/ year          | 21.9       |
| Rarely                       | 3.5        |

*Source: Calculated from the survey funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (grant number 504.01-2019.01)*

Table 7 shows that among Catholic migrants, 38.0 percent receive the Eucharist (Communion) more than once per week on Sundays, 22.7 percent receive communion once a week, and 22.0 percent receive

communion several times a year, in accordance with the Catholic Church's canon law regarding the reception of communion. As a result, this condition is met by 96.4 percent of migrants. These results show that a significant portion of Catholic migrants partake in Holy Communion, and that they do so in a way that is consistent with their customs from back home.

**Table 8: Compulsory Communion during the Easter Season**

| <b>Compulsory Communion during the Easter season</b> | <b>(%)</b> |
|--|------------|
| Ever did not receive Eucharist                       | 52.7       |
| Never did not receive Eucharist                      | 47.3       |

*Source: Calculated from the survey funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (grant number 504.01-2019.01)*

This table indicates that 52.7 percent of Catholic migrants have at times not received communion in compliance with the canonical requirement that it be received at least once during the Easter Season. This shows that the number of people who do not adhere to the regulations of the Catholic Church accounts for a relatively high percentage. One participant in the interview reported:

I go to Mass a few times a year, but most of the time I miss Mass. Just twice or three times a year, max. For instance, I only attend Christmas and skip Easter. Numerous times, the Anton association leader encouraged me to attend confession; I just went to confession a few months ago. But up until now, I've only confessed and taken Holy Communion a handful of times because I kept going to confession, taking Communion, and then returning home to fight and decide I didn't want to attend any more. (Male, 42 years old, Co Nhue Parish)

As a result, decisions that Catholics make in their daily lives have a significant impact on their ability to receive Holy Communion. If a Catholic immigrant confesses their sins but still sins, they could feel unworthy of receiving Holy Communion. Consequently, some Catholic migrants opt not to receive Holy Communion or go to confession, even though it is mandatory to receive Communion during Easter, according to the law.

Catholics are required to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation under Canon 989 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, which states, “After having reached the age of discretion, each member of the faithful is obliged to confess faithfully his or her grave sins at least once a year.” This sacrament, also known as the Sacrament of Penance, enables the faithful to confess all of their sins and, through the mediation of priests, get God’s pardon for all of their transgressions. They also have the right to partake of the Eucharist to nourish their souls once they have been absolved of all sins.

**Table 9: Level of receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation**

| <b>Level of receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation</b> | <b>(%)</b> |
|---|------------|
| More than once a week                                     | 3.0        |
| One time/week   | 3.3        |
| 1 to 3 times/month  | 12.4       |
| Several times/year  | 75.5       |
| One time/year   | 5.8        |

*Source: Calculated from the survey funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (grant number 504.01-2019.01)*

The survey’s findings indicate that 81.3 percent of the faithful participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation from once to several times a year, while 12.4 percent receive it once to three times a month, and 6.3 percent are pious and devoted individuals who frequently partake in this Sacrament. According to Canon 989 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, Catholic migrants are expected to take part in the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year. As a result, a large number of individuals participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and practically all of them keep it at least once a year in accordance with Catholic Church canon law.

#### ***d) Observing fast and abstaining from meat***

According to Canon 1251 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law of

the Catholic Church, Catholics are only required to fast and refrain from eating meat twice a year (on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday) to atone for all the sins they have committed against God and other people.

**Table 10: Fasting and abstaining from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday**

| Level of abstinence from meat | (%)  |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Never                         | 53.7 |
| Sometimes                     | 21.3 |
| Often                         | 22.0 |
| No Note                       | 3.0  |

*Source: Calculated from the survey funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (grant number 504.01-2019.01)*

The study indicates that a significant percentage of Catholic migrants do not observe the two days of fasting prescribed by the Catholic Church. The results reveal that up to 53.7 percent of Catholic migrants do not comply with this sacred rule. This finding raises the possibility that some Catholic migrants may not be fully committed to their religious obligations, or that they face challenges in adhering to these practices in a new cultural context. In their hometown, it was common for grandparents, parents, or close relatives to provide reminders for religious practices. However, when migrating to a new location without this support system, it may be easier for migrants to forget these practices, particularly if they coincide with a weekday when migrants are preoccupied with work. Additionally, forgetfulness may stem from not attending Sunday Mass, which would otherwise provide an opportunity to hear announcements regarding religious obligations.

#### ***e) Participating in activities of groups/associations***

Religious social capital is developed through membership in Catholic action organizations. According to *Britannica* (2019), Catholic action is “the organized labor of the laity carried out under the guidance or sanction of the bishop in the fields of dogma, morality, liturgy, education, and charity.” There are two main Catholic Action Groups

(CAGs) in Vietnam: 1) Specialized Catholic action organizations that restrict their membership to a variety of factors such as gender, age, a particular industry, certain occupations, or interest groups; and 2) Catholic action organizations, which are typically groups open to all Catholics (Hoang et al. 2021). Statistics for 2016 are still being collected, but Catholic Action Groups in Vietnam have more than 500,000 members. Many people simultaneously join two or more associations (Nguyen Huu Long 2018).

As reported by the Vatican II Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (1965), “For this reason the faithful should participate in the apostolate by way of united effort. They should be apostles both in their family communities and in their parishes and dioceses, which themselves express the community nature of the apostolate, as well as in the informal groups which they decide to form among themselves.” As a result, Catholics have a responsibility and right to participate in Catholic Action Groups.

The results of the survey from the participating parishes show that there are differences in congregation size between parishes. At the time of the survey, Trung Tri Parish in Hanoi’s Hai Ba Trung District, which had been operating for around two years, had nine associations. In contrast, older parishes with more history, such as Co Nhue, Ham Long, Phung Khoang, Thach Bich, Nong Vu, and Cathedral Church, had between 12 and 15 organizations. Particularly, there were over 20 organizations in Thai Ha Parish that catered specifically to members who were migrants.

**Table 11: Participation in migrant groups/associations in Hanoi**

| No | Catholic Action Groups  | (%)  |
|----|---|------|
| 1  | Groups relating to liturgical activities (choir, trumpet team, offerings, prayer, etc.) | 20.7 |
| 2  | Charity Associations  | 13.6 |
| 3  | Groups relating to communication activities   | 4.5  |
| 4  | Service Groups (flower arrangement, cleaning, altar decoration)                         | 5.0  |
| 5  | Educational Groups (students, catechist, parents)                                       | 11.6 |
| 6  | Group related to media activities   | 4.0  |

|   |   |      |
|---|---|------|
| 7 | Catholic Association of fellow-countrymen | 22.9 |
| 8 | Group of Catholic Migrants                | 30.3 |
| 9 | Other Catholic Groups                     | 2.8  |

*Source: Calculated from the survey funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (grant number 504.01-2019.01).*

The survey of parishes in Hanoi shows that the number of people participating in associations of migrants (groups of compatriots and groups far from home) accounts for 53.2 percent. This shows that associations specifically for migrants have many participants, accounting for more than 50 percent of the total number of migrants participating in other associations in parishes. It can be said that migrants participate in large numbers in associations with people from the same hometown or from different hometowns coming to Hanoi for work. Members of congregations with high migrant populations, like Anton of Co Nhue Parish, have about 50 people who go to Sunday service because they participate in the singing. Otherwise, the number of church attendees can rise to 100 on the day in which the association celebrates the feast of its patron saint.

Among the parishes, Thai Ha Parish has one of the largest migrant communities in the area with 24 different migrant associations. Each group adopts its own patron saint and organizes a special celebration on the designated day of the feast. Celebrations include Mass followed by a procession where the image or statue of the saint is carried around the Church. Second, groups involved in ceremonial activities (such as choirs, trumpet players, flower offerings, and prayer) make up 20.7 percent of the total; Education and learning (students, catechist, parents) account for 11.6 percent; and charity associations for comprise 13.6 percent. This result demonstrates that migrants join organizations that cater to them as well as to organizations in service of the Church. In other words, they are open to helping with various church activities in addition to joining associations specifically focused on them. This collaboration shows the first steps in the integration of migrants. The remaining categories, such as the physical training group (4.5 percent), service group (5.0 percent), and group involved in communication activities (4.0 percent), and other categories (2.8 percent) have very low participation. These are social

groups that are less common in the religious community because only a small number of migrants attend.

Through involvement in various organizations, immigrants from different backgrounds can come to know and connect with one another and aid one another in integrating into their new surroundings through church activities. One interviewee reports:

If there is no community, people come here almost exclusively for work, and there is this relationship and that relationship, but with community, people are more connected; people help each other more. Sometimes in the country, we don't know each other, but when we come here, we get to know each other and play together. Whenever we go to church to participate in this and other activities, we are more aware of our obligations. The community is wonderful, helping each other a lot, and the church is quite wonderful. (Male, 26 years old, Hien Xuan Duc Community, Thai Ha parish).

#### *f) Participation in retreats and pilgrimages*

Although attending retreats is not obligatory for Catholics, it is highly recommended for spiritual preparation in advance of significant feast days. Before significant holidays throughout the year, the Catholic community is urged to take part in retreats in order to prepare their hearts and minds for the festivities.

**Table 12: Joining a retreat with associations/groups**

| <b>Participation in retreats</b> | <b>(%)</b> |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| With the parish group            | 44.6       |
| With the original hometown group | 21.6       |
| With a group far away from home  | 20.3       |
| With other groups                | 13.5       |

*Source: Calculated from the survey funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (grant number 504.01-2019.01).*

**Table 13: Participation in pilgrimages of migrants in Hanoi**

|                                       | <b>Participation in pilgrimages</b> | <b>(%)</b> |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Regions                               | North Vietnam                       | 57.3       |
|                                       | Central Vietnam                     | 18.1       |
|                                       | South Vietnam                       | 14.6       |
|                                       | From 2 regions or more              | 10.0       |
| Year of participating in a pilgrimage | From 1993 - 2009                    | 13.6       |
|                                       | From 2010 – 2014                    | 23.6       |
|                                       | From 2015-2019                      | 62.8       |
| Level of pilgrimage participation     | Once a year                         | 31.4       |
|                                       | From 2 times or more                | 22.9       |
|                                       | Never                               | 45.7       |

*Source: Calculated from the survey funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (grant number 504.01-2019.01)*

Undertaking a pilgrimage is a religious practice that can offer significant spiritual advantages. In essence, it involves visiting holy sites and churches to pay homage to God and the saints. Amongst Vietnamese Catholics, the most popular destinations for such pilgrimages are the shrines dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, such as the Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Hanoi, as well as the pilgrimage sites of Our Lady of La Vang in Quang Tri Province and Our Lady of Tra Kieu in Quang Nam Province. According to survey findings, around 44.6 percent of Catholic migrants attend retreats with their local parish group, 21.6 percent with their hometown group, 20.3 percent with groups they join while traveling, and 13.5 percent with other groups.

In terms of destination, the majority of migrants participating in pilgrimage in the North account for 57.3 percent. By going on pilgrimage in the North, the cost of travel will be much cheaper than going to the Central and the South because going on a pilgrimage in the North can take place in a day. However, one can also complete pilgrimages in other places. Fewer people take the trip since it is more expensive to travel



great distances, plus there are additional fees for meals and overnight accommodations. Other regions, such as the Central region, account for 18.1 percent; the South, 14.6 percent; and two to three regions or more, 10 percent.

The local populace can spend money to make pilgrimages to churches in other regions. According to the table above, Catholic migrants' pilgrimage trips began in 1993 and ended in 2019 when the poll was conducted. It is important to note that in the 16 years between 1993 and 2009, the percentage of migrants who participated in pilgrimages was only around 13.4 percent. From 2010 to 2014, that number climbed by about 10.0 percent. Between 2015 and 2019, the number of pilgrims increased more than four-fold compared to the preceding 16 years. However, financial considerations appear to play a role in determining the extent of migrant participation in pilgrimages. Since 2010, those with at least VND20 million in monthly income have shown a rising propensity to go on pilgrimages. This trend is backed by Chi-Square Tests showing a statistically significant link between wealth and the frequency of going on pilgrimages ( $df= 456$ ;  $Value= 517527a$ ;  $p= 0.024$ ).

The percentage of Catholic migrants who make pilgrimages is as follows: 22.9 percent make pilgrimages twice or more per year while 31.4 percent participate once a year. However, over 45.7 percent of migrants have never participated in a pilgrimage. Participating in pilgrimages is advantageous for Catholic migrants as it provides an opportunity for them to meet, interact, and establish connections with other Catholics, both locals and immigrants. Nonetheless, participating in a pilgrimage requires adequate planning and budgeting for expenses such as travel, food, and accommodation. Despite this, the social opportunities presented by these activities are crucial to the integration process of migrants. A male interviewee expressed:

There should be out-of-Hanoi outings that allow people to get to know one another well without creating a barrier; if it's just going to church and getting together once a year for party, it won't work. It doesn't matter, but if you can plan a trip together and have many people go, it will be a huge success. The distance was shortened because of participation,

interaction, and an attitude of mutual exchange. (Male, 48 years old, Anton association, Co Nhue parish).

#### **4. Discussion**

Based on the research findings on the engagement in religious activities by Catholic migrants in Hanoi, the following remarks can be made:

This study discovered that immigrants with greater levels of education engage in religious activity at a higher rate than immigrants with lower levels of education. Also, this study is comparable to one by Jang and Johnson from 2005, which found that more women than males participate in religious activities. The study also affirms that participation in religious activities allows migrants to build a social network by connecting with local people and other migrants. As per the findings, 20 percent of migrants reported taking part in catechism classes, while retreats and pilgrimages offer additional opportunities for migrants to bond with fellow believers and non-believers alike. Building a social network through religious activities and community associations can provide valuable support in various areas, such as housing, employment, and education (Vermeulen and Penninx 2000; Wessendorf 2018). Such interactions facilitate a deeper understanding and attachment among migrants, creating a strong and supportive network that can provide assistance and better access to information.

The findings of this study reveal a significant aspect that benefits the Catholic Church, namely, the crucial role of laypeople in fostering participation in religious activities and supporting the church. Through voluntary religious engagement or with the help of like-minded acquaintances, laypeople enhance their self-confidence and establish connections in their new community.

The fact that migrants take part in retreats and pilgrimages with residents of the communities they belong to in their new parish demonstrates how migrants are gradually integrated into their new environment. Some individuals who move to Co Nhue parish and make their first family pilgrimage as a result of joining the Anton organization are encouraged

to participate in the pilgrimage even though they have never even made a pilgrimage to a church before. A migrant shared his retreat/pilgrimage experience as follows:

Last time, I traveled to the chapel in Tam Dao with the Anton Association in order to combine a retreat and a pilgrimage. I have only made one pilgrimage due to my company's hectic schedule. To be really honest, attending retreats and pilgrimages gives me a chance to connect with my spirit, and I often consider what to teach my kids during these times. (Male, 42 years old, Anton association)

To sum up, participating in religious activities provides migrants with a unique opportunity to integrate into the society of their destination more quickly and progressively. As religion represents a form of social capital, it offers migrants advantages in engaging in religious activities and building social relationships through associations, which can help to mitigate the challenges and problems associated with migrating. The parish priest and pastoral council play significant roles in leading and organizing groups, especially for immigrants, to help support various parish activities. Moreover, association leaders must actively visit immigrant households and engage in welcoming initiatives to promote growth and support. Moreover, planning more retreats and pilgrimages that facilitate interactions between migrants and locals is essential. This can allow immigrants to build meaningful relationships with non-immigrants, which can help break down barriers and foster greater integration.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study provides insights into the role of religion as a facilitator for Catholic migrants in adapting to their new surroundings. Through the formation of religious networks, Catholic migrants can maintain and express their religious beliefs and practices while also connecting with local people and other migrants more frequently in their new location. Furthermore, this study sheds light on the influence of gender on religious participation among Catholic migrants. Existing research has shown that women tend to participate in religious events to a greater

extent than men, underscoring the active role played by Catholic female migrants in religious activities following their relocation. Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between religion, migration, and gender.

This study is distinctive in highlighting the role of the laity in organizing and coordinating church groups, retreats, and pilgrimages that serve to inspire and unite people. As immigrants adjust to their new parish and surroundings, they often participate in various parish groups. While the study emphasizes the benefits of Catholic migrants engaging in religious activities for easier integration into a new community, it does not fully explicate the mechanisms through which such participation leads to integration. The study's contributions offer several avenues for further research on the role of groups and individuals in promoting integration and the specific religious activities that facilitate the integration of migrants.

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