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The number of women joining religious orders in England and Wales has almost tripled in the last three years, according to bishops' conference figures.

In 2011 there were 17 new women recruits to orders across the country, up from six in 2009.

Asked if this marked the beginning of a revival for women religious in Britain Fr Richard Nesbitt, Westminster vocations director, said "something is definitely happening".

The women have entered orders across 10 dioceses, with East Anglia and Arundel and Brighton dioceses seeing the highest numbers of new additions, with three new recruits each.

Sister Cathy Jones, religious life promoter at the National Office for Vocation, said there was a "significant increase in those thinking of entering religious life".

Sister Cathy took her final vows a year and a half ago as a member of the Religious of the Assumption, a congregation which works in education, inter-religious dialogue and ecumenism, as well as running a house of hospitality.

She said there had been a record number of women at Westminster diocese's "Come and See" event in February, which enabled women to take the first step in exploring consecrated life.

"Over 30 women came, which is unheard of for 20, probably 30 years," she said.

New recruit Katrina Alton, an ex-Baptist who converted in 2001, is due to enter the novitiate of the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph of Peace in September. The congregation, which serves north and central America as well as Britain, focuses on peace and justice, something that appealed to her as she grew up experiencing conflict in Belfast.

She said that attitudes to vocations were changing with more focus on "igniting the spirit in every Catholic to discern their role in the Church".

Francesca Gillett - Catholic Herald