

Retirement Fund for Religious

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News

Back to the Future: 12th Century Monastic Charism Meets 21st Century Advances

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Mount Saint Mary's Abbey in Wrentham, Massachusetts, is at once old and new, a juxtaposition of tradition and innovation. The slow whoosh of a wind turbine mingles with the silence of a cloistered convent, and the sunlight that illuminates morning Mass is captured by new solar panels to generate energy. The sisters who live here, Cistercians of the Strict Observance (known as Trappistines), understand that sustaining their monastic way of life requires honoring the past while embracing the future.

Each sister makes a daily and lifelong commitment to offer a balance of prayer and work that supports the spiritual and material needs of all members. No one makes a salary, but every sister's labor contributes to the community's available resources. The Trappistines' "retirement plan" centers around operating the monastery in a way that sisters can live out their vows in one place until death. Through their ongoing relationship with the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO)—including recent participation in the NRRO's Planning and Implementation Assistance program—the community has developed strategies to care for their members and monastery, now and in the years to come.



The Trappistines of Mount Saint Mary's Abbey worked with the NRRO to develop a master plan to ensure the ongoing viability of their monastery, allowing them to sustain the balance of work and prayer central to Cistercian life.



Above: Sisters pray together in the chapel six times daily.

Inset: Sister Evelyn McGarry works in the community's candy facility.

Back to the Future, continued

Planning for Tomorrow

In 1998, when the monastery was roughly 50 years old, the Trappistines committed to a revitalization that would promote ongoing viability for the community. Their goal was to accommodate the changing needs of older members while providing support and formation for younger ones. A first step was building a new infirmary that offers elders easy access to the chapel, refectory, and common rooms. Between 2000 and 2008, multiple consultations with the NRRO resulted in (1) financial education and training, (2) fiscal and demographic forecasting, and (3) accommodations to increase handicap accessibility and elder safety.

Work with the NRRO also helped the Trappistines develop tactics for increasing the community's income. Candy-making is their primary source of revenue. Installation of a state-of-the-art candy machine and the 2011 construction of a modern candy facility increased

efficiency and profits. Connected to the main abbey building, the facility's location and updated equipment make it easier for older members to participate in the community's main industry.

In January 2014, the Trappistines entered Planning and Implementation Assistance with the goal of creating a road map for future enhancements and ongoing member care. Although the community continues to receive new vocations, they also face a rising median age and need to increase the funds available for eldercare. The sisters sought a professional review of their expansive, mixed-use property, which—in addition to the candy building and abbey—includes a retreat house, a small farm where they raise sheep, and land leased to a solar panel company. Primary concerns were budgeting for ongoing maintenance and renovations, handling aging buildings, increasing income, and reducing expenses.



The Trappistines' main source of income is candy-making. The sisters also enjoy working in their gift shop and with a small flock of sheep.

Above: Sister Peter Shreenan serves in the gift shop.

Center: Community members of all ages serve in the candy facility.

Right: Sister Robert Blough cares for the Trappistines' sheep.



Back to the Future, continued

A 2015 NRRO Planning Assistance award provided funding for a feasibility study to engage architects, engineers, and land-use experts. Working with their NRRO volunteer consultants and incorporating recommendations from the feasibility studies, the Trappistines developed a long-range master plan for their large property and multiple buildings. The plan addresses the community's current and future needs and integrates funding objectives with their commitment to care for the environment.

Step by Step

Full implementation of the plan will take several years, so the community decided to begin with actions that will have the most immediate and lasting impact on their bottom line. Between the main abbey building and their candy-making facility, the community's greatest expense is electricity. A 2016 NRRO Implementation Assistance

award underwrote the installation of solar panels on the candy building and abbey. Recently completed and now fully operational, the solar panels will drastically reduce energy costs. Additionally, the State of Massachusetts offers Solar Renewable Energy Credits (SRECs). Through the quarterly sale of SRECs, the Trappistines will realize substantial annual revenue. Relocation and installation of an energy-efficient, walk-in refrigerator and freezer will further lower expenses. The savings and additional revenue generated from these energy initiatives are conservatively estimated to net the community \$52,000 per year.

The community's Implementation Assistance award also provided funding for a feasibility study on extending the geothermal heating and cooling system used in the candy facility into the main abbey building. Doing so would eliminate the need for heating oil,



A 2016 NRRO Implementation Award underwrote the installation of solar panels, which will drastically reduce energy costs. *From left:* Abbess Mother Maureen McCabe and Sister Mariann Garrity discuss plans with Derek Sabin, construction manager for Suncommon, a company that specializes in solar-energy solutions.

Back to the Future, continued

another significant expense. Findings from the study will be available shortly. If the geothermal system can be extended into the main building, the community hopes the cost of retrofitting it will ultimately be covered by the energy savings realized. Additionally, the feasibility study is providing the Trappistines with the data necessary to apply for a grant from the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center. If awarded, this grant will allow the sisters to actually implement the study's recommendations.

Caring for Sisters Old and Young

Trappistines take a vow of stability, committing to live within their monastery until death. The decisions the community has made and makes regarding their land and facilities are designed to ensure that each sister's needs can be supported throughout her life. Older sisters requiring assistance reside in the infirmary. Well elders live in the main abbey building and receive basic preventative care and therapeutic support in the infirmary. Sister Katie McNamara, a registered nurse, oversees eldercare and is supported by a combination



On Sunday mornings, younger members of the community share coffee and conversation with older members. *Clockwise from lower left:* Sister Rita Rodrigue, Ashley Logsdon,

Sister Cecile Jubinville, Sister Maria Girza Worlikar, Sister Perpetua Wawryk, Sister Jane Smith, Sister Carol Holohan, and Sister Karla Goncalves.

About the Trappistines

Founded in 1949, Mount Saint Mary's Abbey in Wrentham, Massachusetts, is the first Trappistine monastery in the United States. It is home to a multicultural, multigenerational community of 42 contemplative

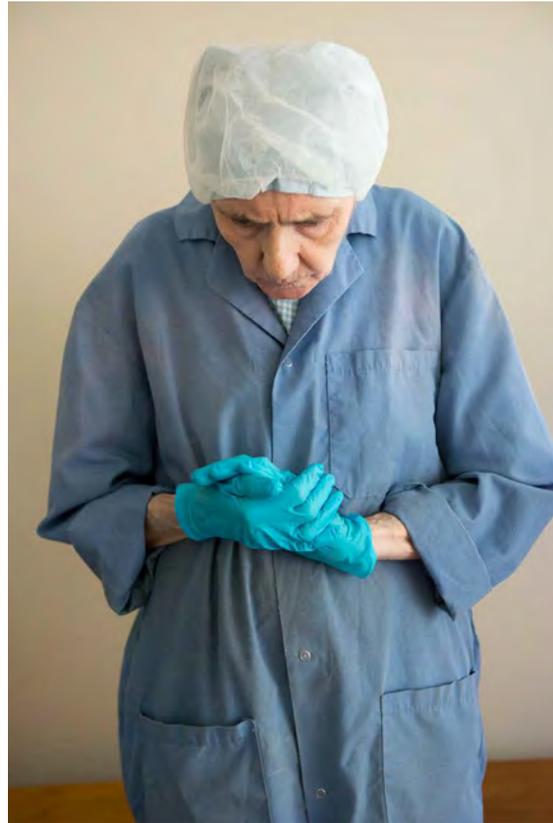
nuns who are Cistercians of the Strict Observance. In the Benedictine tradition, the sisters' lives are centered around prayer, silence, and work. The community is self-sustaining, with candy-making

as the primary industry. From this monastery, four additional Trappistine communities have been established.

of lay professionals and community members. During the week, licensed practical nurses help with care in the morning and afternoons. Lay staff also furnish needed therapies. During the evening and nights, Sister Katie is assisted by a balance of a professional staff from a local agency and sisters who volunteer. On weekends, community members sign up to serve in the infirmary. Yet, the time younger sisters spend there is about more than covering shifts. It is about learning from their elders how the vow of stability shapes and supports their monastic family.

The Road Ahead

The Trappistines will leverage the revenue generated from their energy-saving initiatives to increase the funding available for eldercare and to implement additional aspects of the long-range plan. Among other areas, these steps will further reduce their unfunded liability, decrease expenses, and provide elder-friendly renovations. Moving forward, the sisters will continue to combine thoughtful planning and modern technologies to sustain their centuries-old tradition of prayer and work.



“Our older sisters are such treasures. As a community, we’re very committed to caring for them.”

Sister Katie McNamara, RN

Above: Sister Teresa Mahoney takes a break from her work to say “None,” the mid-afternoon prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours.

Left: Sister Katie McNamara, who oversees the infirmary, visits with Sister Carol Holohan.

New Tending the Vineyard Video Series

Funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Tending the Vineyard (TTV) is an NRRO project to promote effective property planning among religious institutes.



In evaluations from the 2016 national TTV workshops, congregational leaders expressed a desire for resources that would provide ongoing and in-depth support for addressing specific areas of property planning. In response, the NRRO has developed a series of five videos and accompanying support materials that offer detailed tips, information, and methodologies. The videos feature guidance from property experts and insights from religious who have completed property initiatives at their



own communities. They are designed for use by religious institute leadership and members, as well as lay staff and stakeholders who

aid institutes in assessing and managing properties. The videos can be watched individually or as a series. Support materials accompany each video and can be accessed as needed or used in their entirety.

Visit our website to explore and learn: <http://www.usccb.org/about/national-religious-retirement-office/tending-the-vineyard.cfm>.

National Retirement Fund for Religious Collection

December 9–10, 2017



The national collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious will be held in most parishes December 9–10. Note that some (arch)dioceses choose to hold the appeal on alternate dates. Please join in promoting a generous response to the appeal:

- Speak at local parishes.
- Write to parishes where your members serve or have served to request support.
- Post a notice on your community's social media platforms. English and Spanish text and downloadable images are available in our social media toolkit, <https://retiredreligious.org/social-media-toolkit/>.

Message from the Executive Director

We are excited to feature the Trappistines of Mount Saint Mary's Abbey in our fall newsletter. With the heart-wrenching natural disasters of the last few months reminding us our fragile earth needs some TLC, the Trappistines' energy initiatives are a double win, saving money and caring for the environment in a thoughtful, sustainable way.

What strikes me most is that their efforts were informed by and centered around their charism and mission. Since work and prayer are essential to Cistercian life, the Trappistines had to find ways to adjust the work so that aging members could continue to participate. Likewise, reducing expenses was central to being able to provide for the community's ongoing needs. Careful planning allowed them to implement strategies that lowered costs while furthering their commitment to caring for the environment.

It's important to note that the Trappistines' planning was not a one-and-done proposition. Rather, they recognized years ago that supporting their monastic community would require continually adapting to new realities while maintaining their unique expression of religious life. Tremendous thought and hard work went into developing their master plan—extra tasks accomplished within the structure of their daily monastic schedule. Yet it was time well spent as the resulting solutions align with their congregational values and way of life.



Participation in Planning and Implementation (P and I) Assistance requires a substantial commitment of time and effort. We urge participants to think holistically about what is needed for the ongoing viability of their communities. Rather than just “fixing” a specific problem, planning helps ensure retirement needs can be met while mission and ministry endure—even if the specific expression of that mission and ministry evolve.

The Trappistines embraced this holistic approach, using their P and I participation to develop a plan for their land and buildings that will carry them into the future. If your community has property-related concerns, I encourage you to explore our new property-planning video series. (*See page 6 for details.*)

Recognizing that the P and I program and all the work of our office is only possible through the generosity of donors to the annual Retirement Fund for Religious collection, I ask your support and prayers for the success of the upcoming national appeal.

With gratitude,

Sister Stephanie Still, PBVM

NRRO Calendar

November

13–14 USCCB Fall General Assembly, Baltimore, MD

14 NRRO Webinar:
*Medication Safety for Older Adults:
Communication is the Key*

December

8 Feast of the Immaculate Conception
USCCB/NRRO closed

9–10 Retirement Fund for Religious National Collection

11–14 CMSM New Leaders' Workshop, Washington, DC

January

1 Direct Care Assistance applications mailed

17 NRRO Assistance Review Committee meeting

26 NRRO Management Committee meeting

28–30 Informational meetings on Planning
and Implementation Assistance
San Antonio, TX

February

13 NRRO Webinar, Topic TBD

19–22 Dementia Workshop, Danville, CA



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The National Religious Retirement Office coordinates the national collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious and distributes these funds to eligible religious institutes for their retirement needs. Our mission is to support, educate, and assist religious institutes in the U.S. to embrace their current retirement realities and to plan for the future.

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Please send changes in address, phone, e-mail, or congregational leadership to the NRRO, c/o Karen Canas (kcanas@usccb.org), so that we may keep our records and mailing lists updated.

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