



NATIONAL RELIGIOUS RETIREMENT OFFICE
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Backgrounder: Retirement Fund for Religious

The appeal for the Retirement Fund for Religious (RFR), now in its 19th year, has generated a greater response than any annual appeal in U.S. Catholic Church history. Almost \$500 million have been raised through this appeal to help ensure appropriate care and handicapped accessible housing for more than 37,000 Catholic sisters, brothers, and religious order priests who are now past age 70.

The crisis in unfunded retirement became evident in the early 1970s. Catholic schools, operated primarily by religious orders, were educating more than 10 percent of the student population in the United States. Catholic hospitals were becoming the largest group of not-for-profit hospitals in the nation. But the salaries and stipends to religious were earmarked primarily for good works, new ministries, and training and education that prepared religious for ministries.

For generations, the care of elderly members had been carried out by those entering religious life. Today, however, elderly religious far outnumber wage-earning religious. Retired religious today receive on average one-third of the benefit paid to the average Social Security recipient. Most church and diocesan pension plans do not cover religious institutes, which are organized independently. Health care costs have skyrocketed and the number of elderly religious in assisted living or nursing facilities has risen dramatically.

In 1988, church officials launched the Retirement Fund for Religious. The National Religious Retirement Office, which sponsors the appeal, returns almost 95 percent of donations as grants to religious institutes, far exceeding the average nonprofit in the percentage of donations applied directly to mission. Special grant awards are used to meet emergency needs. Since it was established, NRRO has expanded its services to assist strategic planning for retirement; and track emerging trends in elder care, property utilization, and publicly funded programs. The NRRO database is one of the most complete sources of information about the status of religious life in the United States today.

NRRO is sponsored by the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR), the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Nationwide, 170 of the country's 185 dioceses participate in the RFR appeal. Eight others sponsor local appeals.

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NRRO financial data extracted from the full audited financials that can be made available on request.