

Retirement Fund for Religious

Spring 2006 Newsletter

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NRRO: Where We've Been, Where We're Going

Over roughly the last twenty years, great strides have been made in addressing the retirement crisis for religious men and women in the United States. Support from the Retirement Fund for Religious (RFR) has enabled religious institutes not only to bolster retirement accounts, but also to engage in the thoughtful planning necessary to promote long-term stability and viability.

In the early 1970's, several groups began research on the retirement needs of religious men and women. Escalating health care costs, increased life-expectancies, and shifting demographics that left religious communities with more older than younger members, made it apparent that most religious institutes would not have adequate funding to cover the cost of care for their retired and infirm members.

By 1980, a Tri-Conference task force had been established to study the implications of the retirement crisis; and by 1985, the recommendation was made that a national office be created to begin to address the situation. The National Religious Retirement Office (then the Tri-Conference Retirement Office) officially opened its door in 1988. Today, the NRRO is sponsored by the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The original mission of the NRRO was to promote and coordinate the Retirement Fund for Religious appeal and to distribute these monies in grants to eligible religious congregations for retirement needs. Since 1988, donations to the RFR have

exceeded \$460 million, making the RFR the most successful appeal in the history of the Catholic Church in the United States.

Over time, the NRRO mission has expanded as the office has gained a better understanding of the needs of religious institutes and of the necessity of engaging in strategic, long-range planning. Today, the office designs and facilitates educational tools, services, and materials that allow communities to consider their retirement realities in more informed ways. Planning instruments, such as the *Retirement Needs Analysis* and financial formatting tools, help religious institutes better assess their current and ongoing retirement needs and assets. Workshops address numerous topics; such as, emerging trends in elder care, investment issues, government programs, and building or renovating for retirement care. In addition, the 2004 *Best Practices Study* provides real life, hands-on examples of how other religious congregations have effectively addressed their retirement needs. Through these programs and services, NRRO helps religious institutes maximize the impact of the appeal.

The combination of grant assistance, education, and strategic planning has made dramatic differences in the number of religious institutes fully funded for retirement. Since

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1985, many institutes have gone from no retirement plan to a comprehensive strategy that enables them to care for senior members while maintaining a focus on mission and ministry.

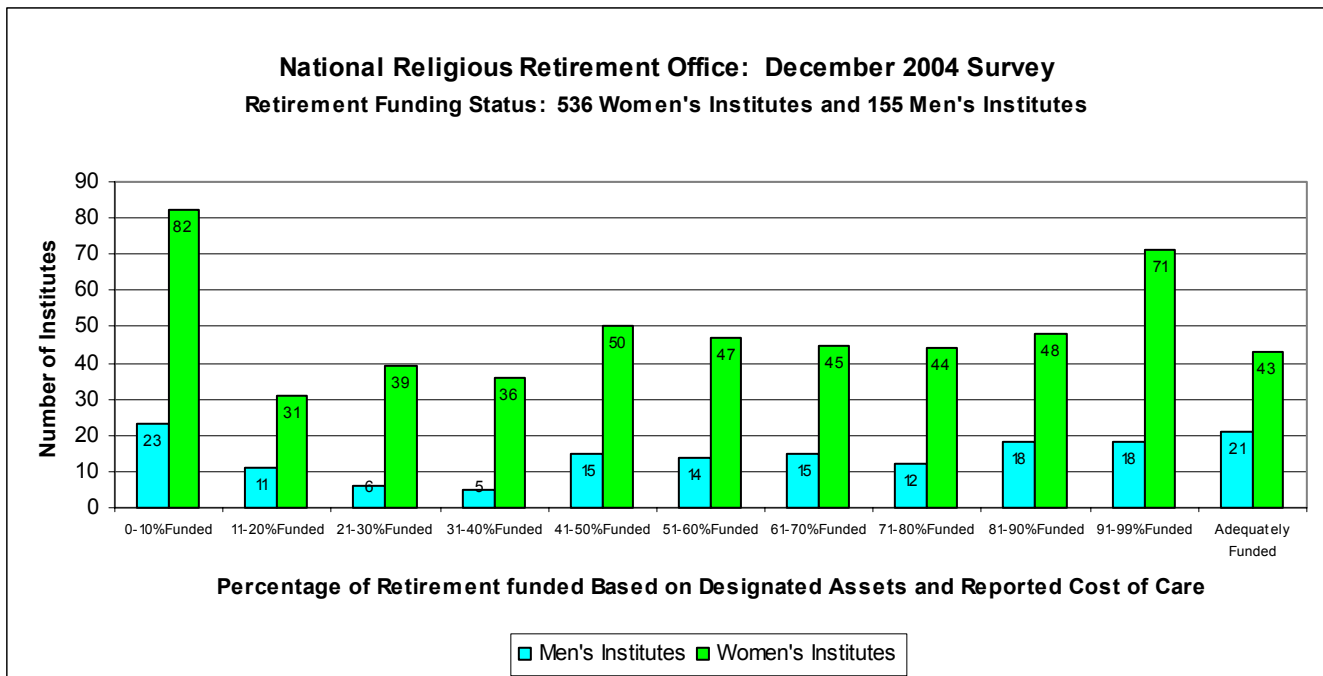
Challenges Remain

Despite the tremendous progress that has been made in addressing the religious retirement crisis in the United States, significant challenges remain. As the chart below clearly shows, levels of funding for retirement vary greatly among religious congregations.

While generosity to the RFR has been unparalleled, it has been unable to keep pace with skyrocketing healthcare costs. In 2004, the costs of living for all elderly religious in the United States exceeded \$910 million dollars. The cost of care for a single year, then, is nearly double the total contributions that have been made to the RFR since 1988. Data also suggests that by 2023, the number of religious over the age of 70 will greatly outpace the number of those still working. Thus, income sources for religious communities will be severely reduced.

The challenge to provide quality care for the frail and elderly can be overwhelming. Yet, as they have in so many other areas of American life, religious are leading the charge. While the cost of skilled nursing care in the United States averages \$145 per day, religious institutes have kept the average cost of skilled care to \$126 per day. Religious communities have also found innovative ways to collaborate with other institutes and with lay organizations and agencies. Working cooperatively, many congregations have even found ways to care for their own members while offering much needed services to low-income seniors. No doubt, these models of care will become increasingly valuable as the population of the United States ages.

In the coming years, the NRRO will continue to strive to leverage the funds collected through the RFR to promote systemic change in the way religious institutes finance and address their retirement and eldercare needs. And elderly and infirm religious will, no doubt, continue to demonstrate what it means to age with grace, dignity and faith.



Director's Message

When I consider all that has been accomplished in addressing the retirement crisis for religious institutes in the United States, I am both proud and grateful. For me, this work represents the best our Church has to offer; that is, religious, laity, and clergy coming together to meet a pressing need. I am and continue to be thankful for the tremendous generosity shown to the RFR and for the many volunteer efforts on behalf of senior religious. Currently, we have 82 lay and religious who conduct three-day site visits to assist religious communities in their long-range planning efforts. Of those we have 35 eldercare consultants, 10 leadership consultants, and 47 finance consultants. These individuals really multiply the efforts of our small staff.

I am proud, too, of the work that our office has done in terms of education, programs, and services to help communities plan more strategically for the future. These resources have been effective, in large part, because of the openness of religious to new and creative approaches. Working with the NRRO and our many consultants, religious institutes have been able to leverage the support furnished by the RFR and make real strides in addressing their retirement situations. Because of this, the RFR has not been just a band-aid, but a means of effecting lasting change in the retirement futures of many congregations.

I do recognize, however, that the crisis is not fully resolved. Currently, there are some 1094 religious institutes in the NRRO database, and these institutes have a wide range of funding levels. Rising health care costs and declining census in many communities present significant challenges towards our goal of ensuring ample retirement funds for all religious. Our office remains committed to raising awareness of the

assistance available through the RFR and to identifying those institutes with the greatest needs. There is, indeed, much work to be done.

So I ask for your continued prayers for the needs of senior religious, and I praise God for all that we have been able to accomplish thus far.

May our loving God bless you,

Sister Andrée Fries, CPPS
Executive Director

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Please send changes in address, phone, e-mail or congregational leadership to NRRO c/o Jean Smith so that we may keep records and mailing lists updated.

Thank you

No matter what we name the later years of life, there comes a point when, despite continued good health, we no longer have the stamina and energy we once had. Full days in the classroom, hospital, or social service agency become too much. Even the contemplative may find that s/he can no longer manage a full schedule of prayer and work. How do we, as religious women and men, view the journey through these years? What is this time of life for us?

In his book, *What Are Old People For?*, author William Thomas proposes that American culture, which places such great emphasis on productivity, has yet to discover the purpose of

old age. I suggest that charting this course is an emerging ministry for religious. Religious are ahead of the age curve of the general population. Can we set up mile markers to help aging baby boomers understand that the later years are not just a road to loss and diminishment but also a path to greater personal and spiritual enrichment? After all, real grace is found in the journey, not the destination.

Suggested reading:

**What Are Old People For?:
How Elders Will Save the World**
William H. Thomas, M.D.



SING Grants

Supplemental Identified Needs Grants (SING) continue to be available for educational opportunities in financial management, development, or elder care. The grants, which can be up to \$5,000, are available for religious institutes that are fifty percent or more underfunded for retirement, with preference given to those in the thirty percent range. NRRO believes that education and networking with other religious communities are a critical component of addressing retirement planning concerns. For application forms or additional information, contact Sister Janice.

Reminders for Diocesan Coordinators

Collection monies are due to the NRRO by March 31, 2006.

Please remember to contact your pastors in order to update your greenbar order form for RFR campaign materials, paying special attention to Bulletin Inserts and Direct Response Envelopes.

Thank you!

Grant Deadlines Approaching

Basic grant applications are due by March 31, 2006.

Special Assistance grant applications are due by March 31, 2006, for the June Cycle.

Supplemental grant applications are due by April 15, 2006, for the June cycle.

CALENDAR

Collection money due back from Dioceses	March 31, 2006
Eligibility Forms due back to NRRO	March 31, 2006
Special Assistance Applications due for June Cycle	March 31, 2006
Supplemental Applications due for December Cycle	April 15, 2006
Grant Review Board	May 1, 2006
USCCB General Assembly, Los Angeles, CA	June 15-17, 2006
CMSM National Assembly, Burlington, VT	August 2-5, 2006
LCWR National Assembly, Atlanta, GA	August 18-22, 2006
NCDC, Chicago, IL	October 1-3, 2006
CMSWR, Belleville, IL	October 5-7, 2006
NATRI National Conference, Anaheim, CA	October 11-14, 2006
NRRO "Personal Centered Care Seminar," Chicago, IL	Oct. 31 – Nov. 1, 2006
CRLM Meeting, Baltimore, MD	November 10, 2006
USCCB Fall Meeting, Baltimore, MD	November 13-16, 2006