



Retirement Fund for Religious



Spring 2007 Newsletter

Volume 19, No. 1

Education and Grants Help Community Plan for the Future

Sister Christa Maria Hofmann & Sister Robert Blough

Stewardship of resources within Cistercian monastic contemplative communities requires financial self-support and provision for the health and well-being of all members, especially the sick and elderly. As Trappesites of Mount Saint Mary's Abbey in Wrentham, Massachusetts, we have been living this tradition since our monastery was founded in 1949. Our property, investments, and sales from our homemade candies support our living expenses. Like many religious communities, we sometimes struggle. Yet we do not worry. Our charism calls us to surrender completely to Providence in assuring our material and spiritual needs.

While our approach to providing for our community's needs is prayerful, it is not carefree; and we strive to be conscientious stewards of God's gifts. For many years, our commitment to avoiding "unnecessary" expenses extended to fiscal management. Out of respect for our enclosed monastic lifestyle, contemplation, and silence, we relied on self-education rather than formalized training. Home study and an online course furnished the foundation for financial management.

Does this sound familiar to other contemplative houses? It is no under-statement to say in all sincerity that we developed a kind of financial "intuition." We arranged money matters to the best of our homemade expertise, always based on our understanding of religious poverty and a simple way of life.



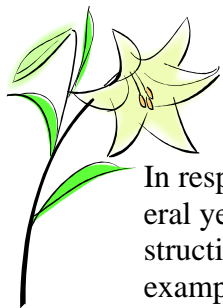
Mount Saint Mary's Abbey

In 2002, however, we received our first eye-opener with regard to our overall financial management. Recognizing the need to conduct a feasibility study and comprehensive evaluation of our monastery, we applied to NRRO for a Supplemental Identified Need Grant (SING). The requirements for this grant included a visit by two NRRO financial consultants. Their accurate assessment of our situation emphasized, emphasized, among other areas, the need for more formal financial education and training.



Contents

• Director's Message	Page 3
• SING Grants	Page 5
• Calendar	Page 6



In response, we have sought over the last several years to take advantage of various instructional opportunities available to us. For example, though we have been members of The National Association of Treasurers of Religious Institutes (NATRI) for many years, we realized only recently that NATRI's educational programs, including the National Conference, instruction in the use of the TRENDS forecasting tool, and seminars for small communities, are offered to contemplative, as well as active, religious communities.

As a result of the NRRO site visit and subsequent learning experiences, our community embarked on a process of reviewing important fiscal areas; namely, planning, budgeting, and forecasting. Our goal was and is to establish a comprehensive retirement fund and plan that allows us to care for our aging members while maintaining our charism and mission.

Although many challenges remain, a combination of education and strategic NRRO grants has enabled us to make steady progress toward our goal.

At present, we have fifty members living in our community. We have a number of sisters in their thirties and forties and are blessed with new vocations. We also have twenty-one sisters over age 70. Most of our older sisters continue to participate in community life—many still work. For those who require more care, we have a spacious and welcoming infirmary constructed in 1999. Our elderly are lovingly assisted as appropriate by members dedicated to their care.

While we were fortunate to complete the new infirmary, other building updates have been required to assure the safety and mobility of all our members. In 2005, a Supplemental Grant from NRRO helped us to install a much needed elevator and fire ramp. Our monastery, however, is more than fifty years old

and lacking in certain safeguards. We continue to work on these areas.

To this end, we have found extremely helpful various NATRI training and workshops. In October 2006, with the help of another NRRO SING grant, this time for education, our community was able to send us to the NATRI National Conference in Anaheim, California. We attended workshops on financial education and management, as well as eldercare.



Sister Christa Maria & Sister Robert

We highly appreciated the wisdom of the workshop speakers who shared their expertise. Equally important was the informal exchange among conference participants, including treasurers and those who care for the elderly. Through these chance meetings, we talked with the person who has since become our financial adviser. It seems that religious finance personnel have, over the years, mobilized a very helpful network. When we returned, we shared our impressions of the conference with our community and listened to a tape of the keynote address. Our community is open and eager to learn.

The informal exchange, especially with treasurers and CPA's at the conference, was also helpful in terms of fund-raising. We support ourselves by making and selling candy.



Through our planning processes, we have identified building a new candy house as one of our most urgent needs. A new candy house will allow us to increase production, thus generating more income to care for our sisters. Moreover, it will enable us to address urgent safety concerns found in our current facility. Funding this project is, of course, a major challenge. What we have learned through these educational opportunities has made us

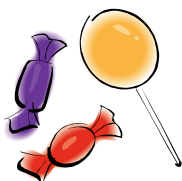


feel much more empowered to tackle a formal fund-raising campaign—something we have never done.

Much work remains toward our goal of establishing a secure financial future for our community, but we feel we are on the right path. The NRRO supplemental grant allowed us to meet our most pressing needs, while the NRRO SING grants have enabled us to realistically assess our situation, educate ourselves, and create a plan for the future. We would encourage other contemplative communities to benefit from the many opportunities for education and assistance offered by NRRO and NATRI.

To learn more about the Trappistines of Mount Saint Mary's Abbey, visit www.msmaabbey.org

To order their delicious candy, see www.trappistinecandy.com



Grant Deadlines Approaching

Basic Grant applications are due by March 31, 2007.

Special Assistance Grant applications are due by March 31, 2007, for the June Cycle.

Supplemental Grant applications are due by April 15, 2007, for the June cycle.

Director's Message

Like most people, by March, I am eager for the arrival of spring. And while I look forward to warmer weather and greener grass, my anticipation also has a more practical focus. In early spring we begin receiving the proceeds from the diocesan collections for the Retirement Fund for Religious (RFR) held each December. Every year, we sort of hold our breath until those final donations come in, and we can rest secure knowing that NRRO can continue to administer much needed grants to religious communities facing retirement challenges.

After more than eleven years with NRRO, I should probably relax about the collection, but I guess I'm not one to take things for granted. After all, I know there are many worthy causes out there. So I am always amazed and extremely grateful for the dedication and generosity God's people show our nation's retired religious.

Many individuals and families send contributions directly to our office. Sometimes these donations include a prayer request. Often, they are accompanied by wonderful, heart-warming notes of appreciation for religious in their lives. Several mention the name of a specific religious for which they are particularly grateful—sometimes many, many years after that person was a part of their lives.

I wish I could contact these religious to give them the beautiful letters I receive. However, finding "Sister Mary Margaret who taught second grade when we lived in Philadelphia" can be a bit like finding a needle in a haystack! And I know too, that while these stories would touch their hearts, the individuals mentioned never needed any recognition to carry out their mission. They were simply responding to God's abiding presence in their lives and to a deep desire to do His will.



As for the generous individuals and families who send these letters and furnish support for retired religious, I wish I could explain to each of them what a tremendous impact their donations have. As noted in our feature story, the RFR makes possible a wide-range of grants, from those that help religious communities address pressing needs to those that enable them to create and implement strategic long-range plans. Together these grants empower religious institutes to tackle their retirement realities, both short and long-term. As the saying goes, they are “a hand up not a hand out.”

For me, spring really does blossom. It blossoms with gratitude for lives offered in service to God’s people and for gifts offered in thanksgiving for these lives. As we move from the holy season of Lent to the joys of Easter, I pray that your spring will flower as abundantly as mine.

May our loving God bless you.

Sister Andrie Fries, CPPS



If you would like to make a bequest or restricted gift to the National Religious Retirement Office, the following information should be used:

To the United Conference of Catholic Bishops Incorporated for the exclusive purpose of assisting Roman Catholic religious orders in the United States to provide for the retirement needs of their elderly members.



Diocesan Coordinators

Collection monies are due to the NRRO by March 31, 2007.

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

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A Time to SING!



Is your community overwhelmed in trying to tackle retirement and/or management issues? Does it feel some days as if you don't even know where to begin? Perhaps it is time to SING!

NRRO often receives calls for assistance with a specific challenge. These can range from setting up the institute's first computerized accounting system to finding a suitable long-term care facility to quandaries about alternate uses for buildings. While we certainly don't have answers for all of these questions, sometimes we can point the seeker to others who have dealt with a similar issue or to an educational program that may be of help.

It is often through queries like these that NRRO recognizes institutes that may benefit from a Supplemental Identified Need Grant (SING) grant and invites institutes to apply.

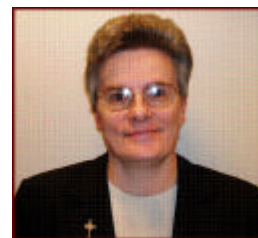
Over the past several years, these grants have concentrated largely on continuing education efforts in finance, development and eldercare. Institutes, such as the Cistercian Monastery featured in our cover story, often find the cost of conferences and workshops a strain on their limited budget. NRRO believes that such grants are a very worthwhile investment in the future of religious institutes, an investment with long-term dividends.

Some other types of assistance offered through the SING grant include:

- Identifying a system for effective financial record keeping or planning
- Reviewing an institute's management, organizational and planning practices
- Funding a financial forecast, e.g. TRENDS
- Funding strategic planning
- Providing a computer, accounting software, and training in its use.

To be eligible for a SING grant a religious institute must be less than fifty-percent funded for retirement. Preference is given to those institutes with less than thirty-percent of the estimated retirement funding needed.

To learn more about SING, contact Sister Janice Bader at NRRO, jbader@usccb.org.



Words to Ponder.....

Here's a great read:

The Best is Yet to Be, Life's Meaning in the Aging Years (Ave Maria Press, 1988)

In this short, easy-to-read book, Eugene Geissler shares his reflections on the early years after retiring from his position as editor-in-chief of Ave Maria Press. He conveys his lived experience of the blessings and challenges of aging.

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

Thank You!

Happy Spring!

CALENDAR

Collection money due back from Dioceses

March 31, 2007

Eligibility Forms due back to NRRO

March 31, 2007

Special Assistance Applications due for June Cycle

March 31, 2007

Supplemental Applications due for December Cycle

April 15, 2007

Grant Review Board

May 1, 2007

NCDC Development Workshop, Darien, IL

May 16-18, 2007

NATRI Orientation to Financial Management, Plymouth, MI

June 4-8, 2007

USCCB General Assembly, Albuquerque, NM

June 18-23, 2007

Basic and Supplemental Grant checks mailed

June 25, 2007

LCWR Assembly, Kansas City, MO

August 1-5, 2007

CMSM Assembly, Cleveland, OH

August 10-13, 2007

NCDC Conference, Phoenix, AZ

September 13-16, 2007

NRRO / NATRI Consultant In-Service, Plymouth, MI

September 21-23, 2007

CMSWR Assembly, Belleville, IL

October 11-14, 2007

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
National Religious Retirement Office
3211 4th Street N.E.
Washington, DC 20017-1194

U.S. Non-profit Organization
US Postage Paid
USCCB