

US Parishes Support Elderly Religious With \$30M

Fifteen dioceses and one archdiocese had record-high contributions in collection to offset rising health care costs



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The National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) distributed \$25 million in financial assistance to 401 religious communities to aid in the care of senior members. The funding is made possible by the Retirement Fund for Religious Collection, an annual, parish-based appeal benefitting nearly 33,000 senior Catholic sisters, brothers and religious order priests.

The most recent collection was held in the majority of U.S. Catholic parishes in December 2015 and raised nearly \$30.7 million, marking the sixth time in the collection's history that donations exceeded \$30 million. Fifteen dioceses and one archdiocese had record-high contributions. In addition, the largest single bequest in the appeal's history was received from the Estate of David and Philip Slesur and was designated through the Archdiocese of Chicago.

“Words cannot express our gratitude for the love, sacrifice and generosity these donations represent,” said Sister Susan Schorsten, a member of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary who was recently appointed as the interim executive director of the NRRO. “The annual assistance the collection furnishes helps religious communities across the country provide for the ongoing needs of aging members.”

The funding disbursed the week of June 20, known as Direct Care Assistance, represents the majority of financial support distributed by the NRRO. Religious communities combine this assistance with their own income and savings to help meet such day-to-day expenses as prescription medications and nursing care. Additional allocations will be directed toward religious communities with the greatest needs and for ongoing education in retirement planning and eldercare delivery. Roughly 95 percent of donations aid elderly religious and their communities, while the remaining five percent are used for administration and promotion of the annual appeal.

The U.S. bishops launched the Retirement Fund for Religious collection in 1988 to address the profound deficit in retirement funding among the nation’s religious communities. Traditionally, Catholic sisters, brothers and religious order priests—known collectively as women and men religious—served for small stipends that did not include retirement benefits. Today, many religious communities lack adequate retirement savings. At the same time, health-care costs have risen dramatically while the number of religious able to serve in compensated ministry has declined.

The NRRO coordinates the annual Retirement Fund for Religious collection and distributes the proceeds to eligible religious communities. The organization 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 the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

More information is available at www.retiredreligious.org.

Zenith Staff