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Catholics Can ‘Share in the Care’ of Elderly Religious

Parishes to Conduct Annual Collection for Retired Sisters, Brothers, Priests in Religious Orders

Catholics in the Diocese of Las Vegas will have the opportunity to “Share in the Care” of senior religious by participating in the annual collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious (RFR), to be held December 11-12, 2010. The collection is coordinated by the National Religious Retirement Office in Washington and provides financial support for the day-to-day care of thousands of elderly Catholic sisters, brothers, and religious order priests.

Last year, the Diocese of Las Vegas contributed \$85,300.37 to this collection. Many women and men religious who serve or have served in the diocese but whose institutes are headquartered elsewhere may benefit from this fund.

Since 1988, Catholics in the United States have donated \$617 million to this initiative. Nearly 95 cents of every dollar is used to aid senior religious.

Despite the overwhelming generosity to this fund, many religious communities continue to lack resources sufficient to support retirement and elder care. Of 573 communities submitting data to the NRRO in 2009, fewer than seven percent were fully funded for retirement.

Traditionally, religious served for small stipends that did not include retirement benefits. Their sacrifices now leave their religious communities without adequate savings for retirement. Compounding the funding shortage are the rising cost of care and the substantial loss of income that has resulted from the declining number of religious able to serve in compensated ministry.

“As the number of wage-earning religious drops, so does income,” explains NRRO Executive Director Sister Janice Bader, a member of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O’Fallon, Missouri. “Census projections indicate that by 2019, religious past age 70 will outnumber those under 70 by nearly four to one. We want to do everything possible to help religious communities prepare for the dramatic income reduction that will accompany this demographic shift.”

As a result of the 2009 collection, which garnered over \$28.1 million, the National Religious Retirement Office was able to distribute more than \$23 million in financial assistance to 477 communities, representing more than 45,000 women and men religious. By underwriting necessities, such as prescription medication and nursing support, these funds help religious communities provide for the ongoing care of elder members. Additional funding was allocated to initiatives targeted for religious institutes with the greatest needs.

Like many other Americans, religious communities struggle with the ever-rising cost of health care. In 2009 alone, the total cost of care for nearly 35,000 women and men religious past age 70 exceeded \$1 billion. “Despite the troubling statistics, many religious communities have made great strides in addressing their funding deficits,” notes Sister Bader. “Religious are humbled by the generous donations to this fund and determined to make the most out of every dollar.”

To learn more, visit www.retiredreligious.org.

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