

Parishes to conduct annual Retirement Fund for Religious Appeal *Elderly nuns, brothers, religious order priests to benefit*

The annual Retirement Fund for Religious national collection will be taken up in parishes throughout the Diocese of Buffalo the weekend of Dec. 12-13. The collection theme is "Share in the Care."

Now in its 22nd year, the collection is coordinated by the National Religious Retirement Office in Washington and benefits thousands of elderly women and men religious whose communities lack adequate funding for retirement.

"Despite the unparalleled generosity of Western New Yorkers to the Retirement Fund for Religious, the needs of elder religious remain profound," said Bishop Edward U. Kmiec. "Rising healthcare expenses, decreased income, and losses in savings and investments make it difficult for religious institutes to furnish adequate care for senior members. The appeal offers financial assistance and services that help religious institutes provide for aging members while continuing to focus on mission and ministry." Through the appeal the Western New York community is given the opportunity to show support not just for the retired religious, who many remember working in their schools, but also for those religious not yet retired, who today minister extensively in hospitals, nursing homes, universities, and with the poor and disadvantaged.

The 2008 appeal drew \$829,753 in the diocese. Since 1988, contributions from individuals and organizations have totaled \$19 million, ranking the Buffalo diocese just behind the archdioceses of Cincinnati and Chicago. Approximately 95 percent of these donations are distributed almost immediately to support the care of senior religious.

Sister Jean M. Thompson, OSF, Vicar for Religious for the diocese, said she is thankful for the generosity that is displayed every year: "I understand that many people are experiencing economic difficulties. I ask that people simply give what they can and to pray for God's continued blessing on all our religious. Rest assured of their prayers for you."

The retirement crisis developed as demographics of religious institutes changed so that now there are more elderly than younger members. The problem has been compounded by skyrocketing health care costs. Today, there are more than 35,000 women and men religious over age 70, and more than 5,500 religious require skilled care.

Historically, older religious worked for years for small stipends, with surplus income reinvested in their ministries, such as schools and social service agencies. Retirement was not a priority in the past when there were enough younger members to care for older ones.

Over the next 10 to 15 years, the number of religious age 25 to 74 is expected to decrease sharply. With this decline, the income of religious institutes will drop precipitously.

For more information or to make an on-line contribution, visit www.shareinthecare.org.