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## National Appeal Supports Elderly Catholic Sisters, Brothers and Religious Order Priests

The annual Retirement Fund for Religious collection will be held Dec. 8-9 in the Diocese of Buffalo. Coordinated by the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) in Washington, the appeal benefits 31,000 elderly Catholic sisters, brothers and religious order priests.

The Diocese of Buffalo donated \$708,000.00 to the last collection. In 2018 religious communities with members serving in the diocese received financial assistance made possible by the Retirement Fund for Religious. These included the Clerics Regular of St. Paul, Conventual Franciscans, Dominican Nuns, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Missionary Sisters of St. Columban, Oblate Sisters of Providence, Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, Sisters of Social Service of Buffalo, Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities, Sisters of St. Joseph, Sisters of St. Mary of Namur and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Almost 94 percent of donations aid senior religious and their communities, with the remaining funds used for administration and promotion of the national appeal.

The 2017 collection raised just over \$28 million, and the NRRO disbursed \$25 million to 360 religious communities for the direct care of elderly members. Communities combine these funds with their own income and savings to help furnish necessities such as medications and nursing care. Throughout the year, additional funding is allocated for congregations with critical needs and for retirement planning and educational resources.

Religious communities apply annually for financial support from the national collection, and distributions are sent to each eligible community's central house. Although women and men religious often minister outside their home dioceses, they may benefit from the allocations disbursed to their individual orders.

"Donations to the Retirement Fund for Religious have a far-reaching impact," said Presentation Sister Stephanie Still, the NRRO's executive director. "Most importantly, they help communities care for aging members, but they also underwrite initiatives aimed at addressing the underlying causes of the funding shortages."

Religious orders are financially autonomous and thus responsible for the support of all members. Traditionally, Catholic sisters, brothers, and religious order priests—known collectively as women and men religious—served for little to no pay. Today, hundreds of orders lack sufficient retirement savings. Of 547 communities providing data to the NRRO, only 4 percent are adequately funded for retirement. Compounding the financial crisis are the rising cost of care and the increasing number of those needing care.

Catholic bishops of the United States initiated the national collection in 1988 to help address the deficit in retirement funding among U.S. religious communities. Since the collection was launched, U.S. Catholics have donated \$844 million to the appeal, helping many communities stabilize their retirement outlook.

"We are overwhelmed by the ongoing generosity toward the annual appeal and by the love and thanksgiving for the service of our elder religious," said Sister Still. "Our office is committed to stewarding these funds in ways that help religious communities care for older members while continuing to serve the People of God."

Visit [retiredreligious.org](http://retiredreligious.org) to learn more.

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