



**NATIONAL RELIGIOUS RETIREMENT OFFICE**  
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## **Backgrounder: Retirement Fund for Religious**

In 1988, Catholic bishops of the United States launched the Retirement Fund for Religious to address the significant lack of retirement funding for Catholic sisters, brothers and priests in religious orders. The National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO), formerly the Tri-Conference Retirement Office, was established to coordinate the annual collection and to distribute the proceeds to religious communities in need.

The deficit in retirement funding can be attributed to three primary factors: insufficient retirement savings, rising health-care costs and declining income. Traditionally, women and men religious worked for little pay. Today, a majority of religious orders lack adequate savings for retirement. At the same time, the cost of care continues to increase, especially as older religious both outnumber younger religious and are living longer. Since 2009, the total cost of care for religious past age 70 has exceeded \$1 billion annually, and, according to NRRO data, there are more than twice as many religious past age 70 as under. By 2026, it is projected that religious past age 70 will outnumber those under age 70 by roughly four to one.\* Income will continue to decline as more religious reach retirement age and leave compensated ministry.

The annual appeal for the Retirement Fund for Religious, which is taken up each December in most U.S. Catholic parishes, provides vital support to religious communities in meeting current and future retirement needs. Since 1989, the NRRO has distributed \$745 million to communities across the nation, including almost \$659 million to help underwrite the direct care of elderly religious. More than \$86 million has supported efforts by religious congregations to stabilize savings and to develop comprehensive retirement strategies.

Roughly 95 percent of donations to the Retirement Fund for Religious aid senior religious; about 5 percent are used for promotional and administrative expenses.

In addition to sponsoring the annual appeal, the NRRO offers assessment tools, educational programming, services and resources that enable religious communities to evaluate and prepare for long-term retirement needs. The office also coordinates an extensive network of volunteer consultants, including experts in eldercare and financial planning, to help communities plan for the ongoing care of senior members.

The NRRO 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 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

Visit [www.retiredreligious.org](http://www.retiredreligious.org) for more information.

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\*Based on data compiled by the NRRO and actuarial projections from the Mercer Mortality Tables for Men Religious and Women Religious (2014).