Through Grief to New Life: A Spirituality for Meeting God in Transition Times is an educational workshop designed specifically for leaders of religious communities and those responsible for elder care. Sponsored by the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO), the purpose of the workshop is to help participants understand the grieving process and the necessary role grief plays during periods of transition. Presenters for the day-and-a-half workshop include experts in grief counseling, pastoral care, and the spirituality of aging.

The latest gathering was held October 14-15, 2011, in St. Louis and marks the second time that the NRRO has offered the grief workshop. Nearly ninety participants, from roughly forty different religious institutes, were in attendance.

Workshops begin with an introduction to various types of grief and include an outline for navigating though different stages of loss. Though grief is often thought of in terms of the loss of a loved one, attendees learn that grief is “a normal reaction to loss of any kind.” Ultimately, grief is the result of unwanted change and can be triggered by various events. For religious communities, unwanted change may be in relation to shifting ministries or, in many cases, letting go of a motherhouse or other cherished building that is no longer meeting the needs of the congregation. For the individual religious, grief may accompany transitions such as retirement or moving into a nursing center. In considering types of loss, participants are encouraged to examine their own reactions to grief and to change.

During the workshop, attendees also explore issues that can arise from bypassing the grieving process, especially since unresolved grief is often manifested in behaviors and attitudes that are destructive to both the individual and the community. Unchecked, these behaviors and attitudes can lead to a pervasive negativity that not only affects the group dynamic but also impacts the ability to lead effectively. Leadership becomes reactionary—jumping from one crisis to the next—rather than visionary.
Workshop Provides Tools for Navigating Change, continued

Ultimately, loss and periods of transition must be accepted before an individual or group can move on to embrace new possibilities. The second part of the workshop introduces a process to promote healing and to enable community members to support and minister to one another. Participants leave the gathering equipped with tools and resources to help their members work through the grieving process as a means of promoting individual and group vitality.

The response to the workshop has been overwhelmingly positive. Attendees remark that the information presented is practical yet encouraging. As one participant put it, the gathering is “two days of enlightenment and inspiration!”

Workshop presenters (from left):
Sister Ann Billard, OLM; Brother Mark Knightly, CSC; Sister Mary Hopkins, OP; and Brother Wayne Fitzpatrick, MM
Message from the Executive Director

“So often we dwell on the things that seem impossible rather than on the things that are possible. So often we are depressed by what remains to be done and forget to be thankful for all that has been done.”

Marian Wright Edelman

Recently, I came across this quote by Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children’s Defense Fund and a tireless advocate for causes some might view as hopeless. Reflecting on her words, I realized how easy it would be to slip into this way of thinking and acting. Much of our work here at the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) is centered on raising awareness about the needs of senior religious and on the lack of retirement funding among religious institutes. Doing so necessarily involves focusing on rather troubling statistics.

But other facts are equally as impressive, and gratitude for these motivates us daily. For example, since 1988, Catholics across the nation have donated over $643 million to support senior religious and their communities. The Retirement Fund for Religious (RFR) collection is now in its 24th year, and yet the generosity of God’s people remains unabated. Moreover, the impact of the RFR continues to make a difference in ways large and small. Initiatives such as Planning and Implementation Assistance enable religious communities to tackle big challenges, like facility issues. And various educational opportunities, including the grief workshop detailed in our feature article, equip caregivers with tools and resources to help them better respond to the needs of elder members.

As profoundly thankful as I am for generous donations to the RFR, I am equally grateful for gifts of time and talent poured out in abundance to support our cause. From our wonderful volunteer consultants to our hard-working diocesan coordinators to religious across the country who pray for the success of the appeal, we are blessed in myriad and beautiful ways. And, of course, we are all blessed by the faith that unites us—a faith that called thousands of elder religious to service and a faith that inspires countless Catholics to give back in thanksgiving.

It is fitting that on the third Sunday of Advent, the RFR national collection date, we will be reminded to “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus” (1Thes 5:16-18). For each of you who support our elder religious in prayer, word, and deed, I give thanks. During this holy season of Advent, may our loving God bless you as only he can.

Gratefully,

Sr. Janice Bader, CPPS
A Fond Farewell

The staff of the NRRO will soon be bidding farewell to Administrative Assistant Jean Smith, who will retire at the end of the month. She has been serving at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops since 1995 and has spent the last twelve years with the NRRO.

As administrative assistant, Jean supports all areas of the NRRO, from meeting planning for various workshops to making sure that more than 160 (arch)dioceses across the country have the materials they need to participate in the annual Retirement Fund for Religious collection. Her favorite aspects of the job include doing the layout for the newsletter and watching the poster and other campaign materials come together each year. “I guess I like the ‘artsy’ things,” notes Jean.

Like the senior religious she has served, Jean will not really be retiring—just moving on to a different phase of life. In fact, she already has a new gig lined up as part-time babysitter for her soon-to-be-born grandson. Jean is also looking forward to spending more time with “Smitty,” her husband of 43 years, and with her two daughters and two other grandsons. An avid scrapbooker, she is eager to pursue her hobbies and to tackle some long-anticipated household renovations.

Jean will be dearly missed, not only for her hard work and efficiency, but most especially for her cheerful manner and ready smile. To Jean, the NRRO staff offers heartfelt thanks for her service and friendship and wishes her much health and happiness in the years to come. God bless you, Jean!

NRRO is happy to welcome Cassandra Malloy to our staff. Cassandra will be taking over Jean’s responsibilities.

Retirement Fund for Religious

National Collection Date: December 10-11

Please pray for our donors and the success of the appeal.
A Christmas Poem

Twas the eve of the RFR collection, and all through the
nation,
Senior religious awaited with great expectation.
The posters were hung in the churches with care,
in hopes that donations soon would be there.

Then the priest donned his vestments while the folks
in the back
settled into their pews for a short winter’s nap.

When what to their wondering eyes should appear
but an RFR speaker, full of good cheer.
She told of her days teaching school at St. Francis,
of uniforms, religion class, and May-queen dances.

She spoke of good times, somehow failing to
mention
the long hours she gave for little pay and no
pension.

But the people remembered the sisters and
brothers,
those who gave willingly for the future of others.
They remembered the prayers, the faith, and the love,
the angels God sent them from heaven above.

So they gave with their hearts in response to the need
to Share in the Care for many a good deed.

Here’s five, here’s ten, here’s twenty dollars more;
here’s one from a child and some change from the
floor.

And this scene was repeated from East and from
West;
from Buffalo to Los Angeles, all gave their best.
Donations were gathered, collected, and counted;
smiles grew wide as the totals mounted.

So, for all that you’ve done and all that you’ll do,
NRRO says “Thanks, and Merry Christmas to you!”

Announcements and Reminders

Help NRRO Go Green
If you are not already receiving this newsletter
electronically and would like to do so, please contact
us at retirement@uscrc.org to have your e-mail ad-
dress added to our distribution list.

Help Us Keep in Touch with You
Please send changes in address, phone, E-mail or
congregational leadership to NRRO at
retirement@uscrc.org, so that we may keep our rec-
ords and mailing lists updated.

Bequests
If you would like to make a bequest or restricted gift
to the National Religious Retirement Office, please
use the following information:
To the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Incorporated for the exclusive purpose of assisting
Roman Catholic religious orders in the United States
to provide for the retirement needs of their elderly
members.

Calendar

December 2011
- 10-11—Retirement Fund for Religious Collection
- 25—Merry Christmas

January 2012
- 3—Direct Care Assistance Applications distributed -
The Direct Care application form will be available
on the website
- 24-26—Planning & Implementation Workshop
  Menlo Park, CA

March 31, 2012
- Direct Care Applications due
- Collection returns due in office
The National Religious Retirement Office coordinates the national collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious and distributes these funds to eligible religious institutes for their retirement needs. Our mission is to support, educate, and assist religious institutes in the U.S. to embrace their current retirement reality and to plan for the future.

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Blessed Christmas