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***Continuing the Journey***

***Sister Janice Bader, CPPS  
Executive Director***

***And God walked, and where he trod  
His footsteps hollowed the valleys out  
And bulged the mountains up.***

This account of creation by poet James Weldon Johnson came to mind recently while flying from Washington, DC to Tucson, AZ. Cruising at an altitude of 37,000 feet, the mountains did appear as though they might have been formed by footsteps on the sandy desert floor, a desert that from this height appeared lifeless and barren.

Safely buckled in my airline seat, crossing the mountains was effortless; at ground level, crossing those mountains seemed a much more formidable task. And, the desert that appeared so barren from above showed itself as teeming with life.

Could this be a metaphor for religious life at this time in history? Looking at this current time from "37,000 feet," from the historical viewpoint of the 1950's or 60's, we may be tempted to see our era as barren. And, when we view the terrain closely, some of the challenges may appear as daunting and insurmountable as crossing the mountains on foot.

In 2007, 681 religious institutes submitted census data to NRRO. More than half (55%) of the members of these institutes currently are between the ages of 60 and 79. 18% are under age 60, and the remaining 27% are age 80 or older. Clearly these demographic facts point to challenging times, but whether these challenges are insurmountable may depend, to some degree, upon our point of view.

The indomitable spirit of religious that built schools and hospitals and much of the social service infrastructure of this country still is alive and well. Religious responded to the challenges of the past, and they bring this same resolute spirit to today's tasks. NRRO is delighted to be able to serve the women and men who embody this "can-do" spirit.

NRRO is in the midst of intense planning for the additional ten years of service that we will be able to provide, thanks to the Bishops' decision to extend the collection. NRRO is committed to working with religious to identify the best tools for addressing today's challenges. Should we cross the mountains in a covered wagon if jets are available? Are there services that you would find helpful? Please let us know.

We can view our era as a barren desert, or we can look closely and see the richness of life in our members of all ages and abilities. Believe, with us, that God's footsteps are forging the way for religious life, hollowing the valleys and guiding us through the mountains. Together, in God and with one another, may we reveal God's grandeur to our world so in need of love.

***We can view our era as a barren desert, or we can look closely and see the richness of life in our members of all ages and abilities.***

## ***Re-visiting Person-Centered Care Conference***

***Sam Fazio & Cate O'Brien, Mather LifeWays***

The results are in and the numbers look promising. All indicators point to a successful pilot training project conducted in fall 2006. It was then that the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) partnered with Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging to offer a train-the-trainer program on person-centered care. Participants from religious institutes across the country gathered in Chicago, Illinois, on October 31 - November 1, 2006, to learn how to implement the person-centered philosophy of elder care.

Supported by a grant from the Retirement Research Foundation, NRRO and Mather LifeWays presented



training modules focusing on four key areas: teamwork; programming; environment; and dementia care. Participants were expected to take their newly acquired knowledge home to train the care staff at their retirement homes.

Evaluation data from participants who took the program back to their staff members supports our intuitive assessments of the program. The initial sentiments of “win, win, win... elders, staff and management” have been borne out statistically.

A total of 1,782 care workers across the country have been trained in at least one module of the person centered care program by conference attendees. These care providers reported improvements in both their knowledge base and attitudes. At least 90% rated components of the experience as “good” or “excellent.”

***“Coming to work is like coming to a second family.”***

***Care center staff person***

Six month follow-up surveys reveal that the conference attendees were overwhelmingly pleased with the program in Chicago and with their experiences with their home staff. Eighty percent of the respondents reported that they were “likely” or “very likely” to implement the training on a long-term basis in their institutes. Importantly, 90% found their staff’s care either “somewhat or much more person centered” than before the training. The vast majority reported a significant improvement in residents’ quality of life.

Overall, we are very pleased with the outcome data. We believe the conference was successful in improving person-centered care knowledge and attitudes of participants and, in turn, their staff.

### ***Are You Interested in a Person-Centered Care Workshop?***



Based on positive reports from our first training conference, we are making tentative plans to work with Mather LifeWays to **offer a second Person Centered Care Training Conference in Fall 2008**. We need your input to know whether we should go forward!

***If you are interested in attending, please contact Andrew Small (asmall@matherlifeways.com). Please include your mailing address and phone number in your email message.***

***Please indicate your preferred training site: Baltimore, MD, or Chicago, IL.***

## ***A Commitment to Change From Institutional to Person-Centered Care...***

***Monique Cassidy, Masspro***

Elizabeth Seton Residence, an 84 bed skilled nursing facility owned and operated by the Sisters of Charity of Halifax, Nova Scotia, has made a commitment to change. Located in Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts, the facility's model of care is transitioning from an institutional model to person centered care. Grants from the National Religious Retirement Office and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Resident Empowerment Program helped to facilitate the change.



A person centered care model transforms values, structures, and practices, enabling facilities to deliver care and services based on the individual needs of each resident. As a result, the environment becomes more like a home than an institution. The approach not only improves patient care, it often leads to increased staff satisfaction as well.

The first step to the Residence's transformation was implementing consistent patient assignment for nursing staff. This meant that the same caregiver cared for the same resident indefinitely. The goal was for residents, families and staff to become better acquainted and to improve the well-being of everyone involved.

The second step was to implement "Life Story Theatre." This project gathered information and stories from staff about what "home" meant to them and what they thought it meant to the residents. Staff quickly discovered that it was challenging to guess what "home" meant to residents. The learning was that residents need to participate in defining "home" for themselves.

This learning process was used to create a theatre production that will be video taped for use in future staff training programs. The goal is to train 75% of the staff in person centered care, incorporating "Life Story Theatre" into art, music, and fitness programs for residents.



Overall, staff members have responded positively to the new model of care. They remark, "I know what's going on with residents... I like this way... I can take better care of the residents."

*Reprinted with permission from Masspro's Spring 2007 INSIGHTS*

## ***Are You Interested in a Property Planning Workshop?***

In November 2007, NRRO hosted a workshop on property planning for religious institutes. We are considering the possibility of offering a similar workshop in early 2009, but we need to know if there is sufficient interest. **If you are interested, please contact our database manager, Monica Glover, [mglover@usccb.org](mailto:mglover@usccb.org).**

We will determine the location of the workshop based on the location of the persons interested, so **please include your institute name and your mailing address.**



## A Vow of Hospitality

### A Long Tradition of Person-Centered Care

*Little Sisters of the Poor*

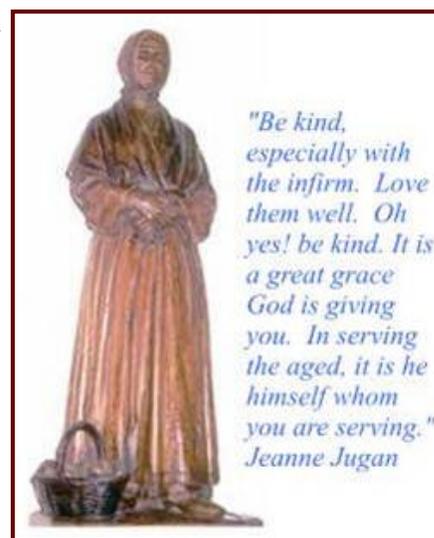
Blessed Jeanne Jugan, foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor, was dedicated to the happiness of the elderly in her Home. Beyond just meeting their needs for shelter, food and medical attention, she was concerned that they had ample reason to smile

In the spirit of our original charism, as Little Sisters of the Poor we continue to emphasize giving happiness to the elderly. We welcome the elderly as we would Jesus Christ himself and serve them with love and respect until death.

Our service is sealed by a fourth vow of hospitality which extends beyond physical care. It also embraces the social, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of the human person to make the later years of our Residents' lives a meaningful time of fulfillment.

We are committed to encompassing the following aspects of quality care:

- ◆ **Respect for the uniqueness of each resident:** We strive to know each resident personally as well as family, background and culture.
- ◆ **Fostering a home:** Beyond an attractive, safe environment, we create a welcoming atmosphere that is both stable and flexible in allowing personal choice and spontaneity.
- ◆ **Meaningful activities:** Social and recreational activities are designed to foster mental and physical wellness as well as encouraging personal responsibility.
- ◆ **Pastoral Care:** We assist the elderly to live old age as a time of peace and to assume the sufferings that may come from the perspective of their personal faith.
- ◆ **Accompanying the Dying:** We assure a constant presence throughout the day and night to those in the dying process. In collaboration with medical specialties, we make them as comfortable as possible. Accompanying someone on life's final journey is the greatest expression of our mission of hospitality and the most sacred aspect of our work.



We invite you to visit the website of the Little Sisters of the Poor at [littlesistersofthepoor.org](http://littlesistersofthepoor.org)

*Given their charism of caring for the elderly, the Little Sisters of the Poor do not apply for funding from the National Religious Retirement Office. They graciously decline funding in favor of those who may have greater financial need.*



*“Love God very much, so that you can look after the aged well, for it is Jesus whom you care for in them.”*

*Blessed Jeanne Jugan*





## **Elder Care Consultation**

**A View from Both Sides... Sister Lauren Van Dermark, CSJ  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, Albany Province**

How often do we hear the response- *It really depends on your perspective?* For me, the words of the song popular in the 70's, *Both Sides Now*, express my experience of NRRO's Elder Care Consultation Service. I share with you my perspectives, As both a consultant and a recipient, on the value of the consultation service.

Our province has been engaged in a comprehensive planning process during which we saw the need for an objective evaluation of the elder care we were providing for our Sisters. We wanted someone familiar with the culture of religious life who could provide meaningful and practical recommendations. Knowing that the NRRO is an invaluable resource, we contacted them for assistance, and the process was set in motion.

The NRRO consultation service is flexible in order to meet the particular needs of the congregation. Preparatory materials enable institute leadership to identify their priority needs and to define the scope of the consultation. The NRRO staff reviews this information to insure the best fit between the consultant team and the congregation. These initial conversations very helpful, and the overall plan was a result of input from the consultants and the congregation.



Consultants Sister Paula Cooney, IHM and Sister Theresa Novak, VSC work on their report for the Sisters of St. Joseph in Albany.

The congregation is responsible for the consultants' compensation that consists of a small stipend, travel expenses and room and board during the 3 day site visit. In my experiences, the consultants stayed at the congregation's facility so they could experience the life of the community. This allowed time to share prayer, meals and informal conversa-

tion enhancing the perspectives that come from the more formal aspects of the consultation.

The on-site visit is a culmination of the excellent preparation and scheduling coordinated by the NRRO, congregation and consultant team. The ultimate goal is to use the time effectively to address the needs of the congregation and to propose recommendations for leadership's consideration. The congregational leadership selects the personnel who will participate in the process and schedules their time with the consultants in a mutually acceptable time-frame. The focus of the sessions is to review the elder care that is being provided, affirm what is working, identify gaps and suggest improvements. The sessions also provide an opportunity to recognize the critical role of staff and to seek their input. All communication is treated in a confidential and respectful manner. The tone is one of mutual learning and support.

The site visit concludes with a meeting with the leadership of the congregation. The consultants present both orally and in written form, their observations, learnings and recommendations. This is an opportunity to discuss and clarify the findings, and based on this conversation, to modify the suggestions as needed. It insures that the final report adequately addresses the congregation's needs and that it provides meaningful and practical recommendations. Following the visit, the consultants send their final report to the congregational leadership and to the NRRO office.

When I told one of our senior sisters that I was writing an article about our experience with the NRRO consultation services, her response probably best summarizes its value:

***It's an opportunity for us to ask if what we say we are providing for our members is the best we can do? If not, what would help us to do it better?***

For more information on the NRRO Elder Care Consultation service, visit our website at [www.usccb.org/nrro](http://www.usccb.org/nrro). Click on "Resources."

## ***Aging Engaged*** ***OPening Word ...The Preaching Continues***

***Sister Janet Jeffers, IHM***  
***Director of Retirement***

Since 1853, the Dominican Sisters of Amityville, New York have preached the word in varied ways and languages—always responding to the need that was before them. The **OPening Word** is one of many sponsored ministries of the Dominican Sisters of Amityville. The Sisters began the **OPening Word** Program in 1991. The program is located in three different areas of Suffolk County, New York – Wyandanch, Amityville and Huntington Station—places where people’s lives are seriously affected by the ravages of poverty.

**The OPening Word**, begun as a literacy and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Program, is focused on teaching women to read and, very often, preparing them to attain their High School Equivalency Diploma. Opening Word attempts to address the unmet educational needs and job readiness skills of unemployed and unskilled women, many of whom head single-parent homes



The program is directed by a Dominican Sister of Amityville and each location has a Dominican Sister as a Coordinator. Primarily, the staffing of each location is by the Sisters. Over the years, the program has served approximately 1400 women. Funding for the program comes through donations and grants from various sources.

Some of the teachers in the program are retired Senior Sisters in the Congregation. They bring their expertise of many years of classroom teaching. They can no longer work a full day or teach a full classroom of students, yet, they continue to preach through their lives of dedication, their example, their goodness and their gifts of educating--which they share freely with the students.



Retired Dominican Sisters of Amityville are not in any way retired from life. One might say they have been **re-fired** to further the mission of Jesus—so desperately needed in our world. Their hearts are “**on fire**” to bring the good news to all who are a part of their lives. It doesn’t matter where the Sister ministers or what she is doing—her simple presence says it all. In addition to her gifts as a teacher, she offers comfort, compassion and prayer to those whose lives she touches each day. ...And the holy preaching contin-

ues...

We plan to make “Aging Engaged” a regular feature of this newsletter. We invite you to submit photos with captions or brief descriptions. Please send them to our editor, Sister Sherryl White, [engagingaging@verizon.net](mailto:engagingaging@verizon.net).



### From the Editor's desk...

Sister Sherryl White, CSJ, Ph.D. Psychologist, Pittsburgh, PA

Belden Lane, in "The Solace of Fierce Landscapes," tells the story of a writer in Australia giving a car ride to an aboriginal friend. The aboriginal man was on pilgrimage, restoring meaning to his life as well as to the landscape. Traditionally, the aboriginal peoples cross the landscape following invisible song-lines sung by their ancestors, naming every characteristic of the land as they pass by, engaging the mutual influence of environment and their own spirit-being.

Cruising at 25 miles per hour, the driver noticed the man jumping from one window to the other, frantically chanting the place-names of his song-line as quickly as possible. Immediately, the driver slowed to 4 miles per hour, allowing the man's song to be sung at a comfortable and proper rate. Only in this way, could the land be adequately honored and their entry into it together made spiritually possible.

Perhaps Lent offers us a chance to consider this relationship between habitat and habitus—where we

live and our way of being in that space. We seem to fly so quickly through the years bringing us to elderhood, that when we get there, we sometimes have little or no idea of what to do or how to be. How can we honor our passing through time, making our entry into elderhood spiritually possible? How can we facilitate a place - a *habitat* - that will enable our spirit-being to flourish as mature, grace-filled, purposeful elders? What are the invitations held forth for us in the song-lines of this new Lenten landscape?

Strangely enough, person-centered care may be a starting point. While it surely addresses the provision of care in facilities, it also offers us some deeper questions as to how we are valuing our own lives and those of others. We hope you will take some time to investigate person-centered care for your facilities, as well as its implications for your personal lives. May our aging be done in and with grace.

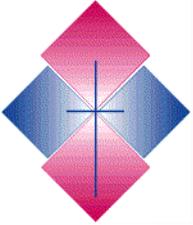
May your Lenten Journey be blessed!

## NRRO Calendar...



- Vicars for Religious National Assembly, San Antonio, TX.....March 10-12, 2008
- Eligibility Forms **Postmark Deadline** .....March 31, 2008
- Special Assistance Grant Applications **Due in Office**.....March 31, 2008
- (Arch)Diocesan RFR Collection Proceeds **Due in Office**.....March 31, 2008
- NRRO Management Board Meeting.....April 11, 2008
- Supplemental Grant Applications **Due in Office** (for December Cycle).....April 15, 2008
- NRRO Planning Meeting.....May 5-7, 2008
- National Catholic Development Conference Workshop.....May 20-22, 2008
- Grant Awards Distributed.....June 2008





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*The National Religious Retirement Office coordinates the national collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious and distributes these monies in grants to eligible religious institutes for their retirement needs.*

*The National Religious Retirement Office supports, educates and assists religious institutes in the U.S. to embrace their current retirement reality and to plan for the future.*

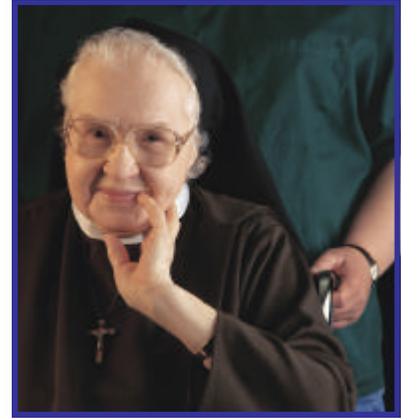
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