

Retirement Fund for Religious

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News

Sharing in the Care: NRRO Volunteer Consultants

In addition to the countless Catholics who support elder religious through their generous donations, the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) is fortunate to have individuals who Share in the Care with gifts of time and talent. Among these are our wonderful volunteer consultants, comprising both religious and laypeople. NRRO consultants represent a broad array of professional experience and furnish expertise in elder care, financial planning, and congregational leadership. Since 2009, when the NRRO's Planning and Implementation Assistance program was launched, the number of volunteer consultants has increased significantly, as has the scope of their service to religious communities.

Participation in Planning and Implementation Assistance requires a twelve- to eighteen-month commitment on the part of both the religious community and the volunteer consultant. During this time, consultants work with the community to identify and develop solutions for reducing the community's retirement-funding deficit. Consultant responsibilities include conducting an onsite evaluation, attending an NRRO planning workshop with representatives of the community, and leading monthly status calls.

Consultants also assist communities in applying for financial assistance to support both the planning and the implementation phases of the new retirement strategy. Lastly, consultants draft a final report, offering their insights and assessments of the work the religious institute has completed.

Currently, there are eighty consultants who support Planning and Implementation Assistance. The NRRO hosts training sessions for new consultants throughout the year. In addition, occasional "in-service" workshops offer all consultants opportunities for professional development and education.



NRRO volunteer consultants are experts in elder care, financial planning, and congregational leadership. Above: Mr. Ray Mattes, IHM, is a professional gerontologist and a nationally recognized leader in the person-centered care movement. In addition to volunteering as an NRRO consultant for ten years, Ray also serves as a presenter for NRRO planning workshops.

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Sharing in the Care: NRRO Volunteer Consultants, continued

In essence, volunteer consultants provide religious communities with a level of personalized support and expertise that, given the NRRO's small staff, would simply not be possible otherwise. Through their work with Planning and Implementation Assistance, NRRO's volunteer consultants help participating religious communities develop comprehensive strategies to care for senior members—strategies for today and tomorrow.

To learn more about Planning and Implementation Assistance, please visit www.usccb.org/nrro and click on Financial Assistance.



Volunteer consultant Father Scott Wallenfels, SDS, specializes in finance. Above: Father Scott celebrates Mass at an NRRO planning workshop.



Two NRRO volunteer consultants are assigned to work with each religious community participating in Planning and Implementation Assistance. Consultants attend an NRRO planning workshop with the community's major superior, retirement director, and treasurer, as pictured above. *Clockwise, from bottom left:* Sister Sharon Kuhn, OSB; volunteer consultant Sister Mary Pat Leroy, SNJM; Sister Juliann Babcock, OSB; Sister Mary Gilbert Schipp, OSB; and volunteer consultant Sister Mary Frances Johnson, CSJ.

Spotlight on Consultants: Sister Jonella Rhoda, RSM

Sister Jonella Rhoda, 80, a member of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, South Central Community, has been a volunteer consultant with the NRRO since 2009. During nearly sixty years of religious life, her ministries have ranged from school principal to retirement-center administrator. Currently a board member for the Mercy Network on Aging, she has served and continues to serve on numerous advisory boards and committees. She brings to the task of consulting a wealth of practical knowledge and hands-on experience in financial management, strategic planning, and elder care.



How did you first become involved with the National Religious Retirement Office?

“Our community has been greatly blessed, and so we were fortunate not to have the necessity of applying for funding from the NRRO. But I have long been aware of the good work they do, especially since I worked for many years with my own community’s retired sisters, both as an administrator and also in a more pastoral role, helping members to transition into retirement. Several years ago, I was involved with moving thirty-two of our sisters into Our Lady of Wisdom (an inter-congregational retirement facility in New Orleans). At that time, a number of the religious communities involved in the center were working with the NRRO.”

What influenced your decision to become a volunteer consultant?

“I was recommended to the NRRO by a sister in my community, and Brother Bob (Metzger, SM, NRRO Associate Director) called me to discuss what was involved and the time commitment. I enjoy working with seniors and senior issues, so it seemed like a good fit. I was also excited by the opportunity to meet other religious and learn more about their communities and charisms.”

You spent several years working as an administrator for your community’s retirement facilities and you also served in leadership. How do these experiences inform the work you do as a volunteer consultant?

“Over the years, I was sort of a jack-of-all-trades. I was never really trained in elder care or in running a retirement center. But there was a need in our community, so that’s what I did. The knowledge I have is all from my own experience, from what I learned day-to-day, and that is what I share in my work as a consultant. The same is true of my experiences in leadership. I share what I know. And I am amazed at how similar the challenges are across religious communities. In many ways, we all face the same issues.”

What do you see as the greatest challenge for communities engaged in the Planning and Implementation process?

“I believe the greatest challenge is making sure the entire community is on board with the planning efforts. Those in leadership must conduct many meetings and conversations, so that everyone—or at least most everyone—understands and supports the plan. It makes it much easier to accomplish something.”

Spotlight on Consultants: Sister Jonella Rhoda, RSM, continued

What has been most rewarding about your service as a consultant?

“The communities that I’m supporting have not yet finished the process; but they have received planning funds, and they are making wonderful progress. They feel hopeful about the work they are doing and their futures. It is a joy to know that I am helping them to arrive at that brighter future.

“I think what the NRRO is doing with this program is wonderful. It’s not just a Band-Aid to fix an immediate problem. They help communities come up with a plan, so the future is taken care of.”

You’ve spent a lot of years serving and/or advocating for senior religious. What do you wish more people knew about senior religious and their needs?

“Sometimes, I’m not sure everyone understands just how small the stipends were. When I started teaching in a parish school in 1953, I think the tuition was about \$2.00 a month; so you can imagine, we were paid very little. And, of course, a good percentage of what we made went back to support the upkeep of the motherhouse and the care of our retired and infirm sisters. After we bought groceries and essentials, there was really nothing left to save.

“On the other hand, I live in St. Louis and the response to the annual (Retirement Fund for Religious) collection here is very, very generous. I think parishioners can look at their own lives—maybe their own families—and know how

expensive elder care is. So they recognize what a struggle it must be for religious communities, and they give whatever they can to help.”



Sister Jonella notes, “I think what the NRRO is doing with this program (Planning and Implementation Assistance) is wonderful. It’s not just a Band-Aid to fix an immediate problem. They help communities come up with a plan, so the future is taken care of.” *From left:* Volunteer consultant Sister Betsy Sullivan, SSJ, and Sister Jonella at an NRRO planning workshop.

Calendar

March 31

- Direct Care Assistance Deadline

April 13

- NRRO Assistance Review Committee Meeting

April 17-19

- Bergamo Planning and Implementation Workshop (Dayton, OH)



Sister Jonella with members of the Daughters of Mercy, one of the religious communities she is supporting through Planning and Implementation Assistance. *Clockwise, from bottom left:* Sister Joseph Marie Hatch, DM; Sister Claudia Mauri, DM; Sister Jonella Rhoda, RSM; Sister Daniel Marie Catherine, DM; and volunteer consultant Mr. Matt Wade.

Message from the Executive Director

During a recent visit to my community's mother-house, I sat next to one of our elder sisters at Mass. Shortly after Mass began, Sister Agnes leaned toward me and whispered, "My tooth hurts." Tears began running down her cheeks. Not knowing what else to do, I offered her a tissue. She thanked me and wiped her eyes. A few minutes later she again told me of her pain. I was at a total loss; I did not know how to help. Then a nurse aide seated behind me tapped my shoulder and asked to trade places. She sat next to Sister Agnes, held her hand, and whispered to her. Within a few moments, she had consoled and calmed her.

Sister Agnes, a dynamic, get-the-job-done person, did not retire from active ministry until age 90. Soon afterward, she suffered a severe stroke that impaired her speech and mobility and left her in nearly constant pain. I knew Sister Agnes as a force to be reckoned with—a principal who could bring an errant student into line with a single glance. Witnessing her decline, and being helpless in the face of it, triggered a deep sadness in me.



Yet God found an opening in that moment of vulnerability. As the celebrant began his homily with the words, "God is faithful to those who wait for him in hope," I was graced with the realization that God was, indeed, faithful to Sister Agnes. Though I was powerless to soothe her pain, God was with her through the loving presence of the nurse aide.

Despite the desires of younger religious to provide for our elders, we recognize our need for help. We are grateful to all who are messengers of God's faithfulness through their generous sharing of treasure, talent, and time. With donations from the 2011 collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious arriving daily, I am reminded of the sacrifices countless Catholics make to help provide for our senior religious. Likewise, we are blessed by the work of dedicated individuals throughout the nation who promote and coordinate the collection on the local level.

And I truly see God's faithfulness in the dedication of our volunteer consultants. The one-on-one attention they offer to the religious communities involved in Planning and Implementation Assistance is invaluable, as is the expertise they share in complex areas such as financial planning and property management. Their service enables our office to furnish intensive consultation and support to many more communities than we could ever hope to reach with staff time alone.

So for all those who Share in the Care, I offer a final prayer—one of thanksgiving. May our loving God bless you abundantly for your goodness, and may we continue to wait together in hope.

Sister Janice Bader, CPSS

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@usccb.org to have your e-mail address 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 c/o Cassandra Malloy (cmalloy@usccb.org), so that we may keep our records 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.



National Religious Retirement Office

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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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