

# Retirement Fund for Religious

Sponsored by the  
National Religious Retirement Office



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## News

### A Covenant of Care

*“If the building is not serving the mission, it’s time to let it go.”*

Father Bernard Scianna, OSA



Father Bernard Scianna, OSA,  
Prior Provincial, Midwest Au-  
gustinians

Change is seldom easy. For the Midwest Augustinians, the decision to give up Tolentine Center, the former seminary building where many of the friars had begun the journey into religious life, took faith and courage. Yet, by re-evaluating their resources and elder-care priorities, the community has been able to enhance care for senior members while reducing expenses.

The friars of the Province of our Mother of Good Counsel are members of the international order of St. Augustine. Known as the Midwest Augustinians, the community has eighty-four friars, plus seven men who are in various stages of formation. Based in Chicago, they minister in Illinois, Michigan, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and various other areas of the country. Friars serve primarily in education and parish ministry and are also active in foreign missions, hospital chaplaincy, and peace and justice initiatives.

Half of the friars are over age seventy. Until recently, well elders and those needing some assistance resided at St. Nicholas of Tolentine Monastery, located in Tolentine Center. Nursing care was provided, but only for eight hours a day and at great expense. Friars requiring skilled care went to any nursing facility that had an open Medicaid bed, forcing them to live out of community.

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Offering living space originally designed for men in their twenties and with little in the way of senior programming, Tolentine was not a place where elder members could thrive. At the same time, maintaining the massive 67,000 square-foot building was strangling the community’s finances. Constructed in 1958, uses of the facility had evolved—from the community’s seminary college to a retreat center and even, for a time, to a residence for lay seniors run by the Sisters of Mercy. Though it continued to house provincial and administrative offices, the building, in recent years, had been severely underutilized.

The idea to sell Tolentine was initially raised some time ago, but province members were not yet ready to let it go. “The emotional attachment to the building was understandable,” explains Prior Provincial Father Bernie Scianna. “But when the leadership started hearing rumblings that members did not want to return to Tolentine for retirement, we knew it was time to act.”

## A Covenant of Care, continued

In 2009, the Augustinians applied to participate in the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) Planning and Implementation Assistance program. Over a period of eighteen months, they received financial and consultative support that allowed them to assess their needs and resources and, ultimately, to implement a comprehensive elder-care plan. Two of the NRRO's volunteer consultants worked with the friars throughout the process. Planning funds from the NRRO also allowed them to hire Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Mary Hopkins, an experienced elder-care consultant, as a facilitator. She guided the Augustinians through a maze of elder-care decisions—gathering and compiling member input, educating friars on the aging process, and researching viable care alternatives.

The result was the creation of a *Covenant of Senior Care*, a document that reflects the Augustinians'

unique charism while addressing their desire to age in place and to live in community. Approved by the membership at the 2010 chapter meeting, this covenant led to the decision to sell Tolentine, a process



## A Covenant of Care, continued

that continues today, and relocate the provincial offices to less expensive space.

In restructuring elder-care delivery, the Augustinians sought to ensure that senior members could continue to live in community, regardless of their level of care. Along with closing the building, this goal required that all friars living at Tolentine be reassigned. Today, well elders reside with active friars in houses throughout the province. At these houses, senior friars can continue to participate in community life and volunteer ministry—activities central to their health and well-being. Friars requiring assistance now receive care at nearby Franciscan Village. Sponsored by the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago, Franciscan Village offers a continuum of services, from independent living to skilled care.

According to their needs, friars reside in either the assisted-living wing or in skilled-care areas. Though retirement age themselves, Brother Jerome Sysko, Brother Lawrence Sparacino, and Father Thomas Osborne live in the independent section and provide onsite support for friars needing care. They visit the friars daily and work with care providers to manage their medical and personal needs. Offsite support is offered by Brother David Adelsbach, a certified nursing assistant who organizes each friar's medicine, and Director of Senior Care Father Michael O'Conner, who oversees administration of the entire elder-care program.

*Page 2, top:* Father John "Jack" Gavin, 89, laughs with Paulette Sawyer, a certified nursing assistant at Franciscan Village.

*Page 2, bottom:* Friars enjoy a community meal at Franciscan Village.

*Right:* Father John Kret (left), 77, and Father Raymond Ryan, 80, reside at the St. John of Sahagun Friary, which serves the community's Providence Catholic High School. Both remain active in volunteer ministry and community life. "Being here keeps me healthy," says Father Ryan. "I could not be in a better place than where I am right now."

In August 2010, the Augustinians formally established a canonical community, Blessed Stephen Bellesini Friary, at Franciscan Village. Each day, friary members gather for Mass, followed by morning prayer. Later, they join for lunch in the dining room at a large table set aside just for them. "Sharing prayer and meals are central to our life in community," explains Brother Jerome Sysko, prior of the friary. As they are able, the friars also continue to minister, often concelebrating Mass or hearing confessions when asked. Additionally, they enjoy the many amenities offered at Franciscan Village. In fact, certain friars, such as Father John "Jack" Gavin, 89, are rarely in their rooms. "He's always busy—playing cards, joining in the sing-alongs, going on outings," laughs Brother Jerome.

Creating a covenant of care has resulted in the best possible outcome for the Augustinians: improved care and wellness for senior members and a decrease in overall costs. Relocation of the provincial offices alone has reduced overhead expenses by nearly two-thirds. Most importantly, for the first time in years, every member lives in community. "When you look at it," says Father Bernie, "Tolentine is just a building, but these men have done so much for our province—our Church. We're grateful that we can now offer them quality care *and* a rich community life."



## Meet Our Eldest Religious

Sincere thanks to all the religious institutes who responded to the request in our spring newsletter for information on their eldest members. Our goal was to identify the oldest woman and the oldest man religious in the country. Numerous names were offered. Among the responses we received, Brother Frank Deibel, SM, was the oldest male religious. For the women, the two oldest submitted were Sister Corazón Garcia, RMI, and Sister Gertrude Fruchtl, OSF. Since they were born just six weeks apart in 1904, we decided to include profiles of both.

### Sister Corazón Garcia, RMI

Our oldest religious, Sister Corazón Garcia, was born in Spain on September 4, 1904. Although her four sisters joined contemplative religious orders, Sister Corazón followed her passion for evangelization and missionary service and entered the Religious of Mary Immaculate on October 9, 1928.

Sister Corazón's early religious life was marked by the political and social upheaval of the times. Near the end of her novitiate, civil war in Spain forced her to be transferred first to France and then to England. For seventeen years, she served at her community's house in London, becoming house superior in 1939. During this time, the sisters opened their doors to crowds of World War II refugees and ministered to young Jewish and Christian women from Eastern Europe.

Toward the end of the war, the convent was bombed. Immediately, Sister Corazón, helped by a Carmelite priest, sifted through the rubble to retrieve the Blessed Sacrament. The next morning, she began looking for a new house.

Sister Corazón, helped by a Carmelite priest, sifted through the rubble to retrieve the Blessed Sacrament.



In 1948, Sister Corazón returned to Spain to serve as her community's superior. She then established a house in India in 1950 and in Mexico in 1963. Later, she started her community's first house in the United States, ministering in New York City for thirteen years before retiring to San Antonio, Texas, in 1979. Since 2006, she has resided at Centro Maria, her community's house in Washington, DC.

Reflecting on her years of service, Sister Corazón has memories of both great hardship and great triumph. In all that she achieved—all the young girls she was able to help during her many years of ministry—Sister Corazón credits God: "I thank God for the gift of life. God called me to follow him, and he showed the way."

## Meet Our Eldest Religious - continued

### Brother Frank Deibel, SM



Marianist Brother Frank Deibel was born on August 13, 1908, in Columbus, Ohio. He entered religious life in 1925, professing his first vows in 1926 and his perpetual vows in 1931. This year marks his eighty-fifth jubilee!

Brother Frank's active ministry life

was devoted to education. During his career, he taught English, Latin, and religion at Catholic high schools throughout Ohio. In 1954, he became the assistant librarian at the University of Dayton's Roesch Library, a position he maintained for nearly fifty years.

In 2003, Brother Frank retired to Mercy Siena Retirement Community in Dayton, Ohio. The facility houses both religious and lay persons so that Brother Frank is able to continue to live in community with other Marianists. At nearly 103, he resides in the assisted living area but remains a faithful visitor to those who are sick and infirm. Deeply devoted to our Blessed Mother, he maintains a strong prayer life, favoring such prayers as the *Memorare* and the Rosary.

Brother Frank's tips for staying healthy include eating in moderation, walking, getting proper rest, and attending daily Mass. He also thinks that having a hobby is important to overall wellness. For Brother Frank, that hobby is an interest in computers he picked up about twenty years ago. His computer, which he jokingly refers to as "his wife," allows him to correspond with more than one hundred e-mail buddies. In the end, though, Brother Frank feels that it is God's will that he has had such a long life.

### Sister Gertrude Fruchtl, FSM

Sister Gertrude Fruchtl, a Franciscan Sister of Mary, feels life is sometimes best viewed through a microscope—an actual microscope. Working in the field of medical technology, she was continually inspired by seeing life in its minutest form, knowing that God dwells even in a hidden cellular world.



Born October 27, 1904, in St. Elmo, Illinois, Sister Gertrude was the fourth of her parents' six children. She obtained a BS and later an MS in medical technology from Saint Louis University. For nearly thirty-five years, she worked in a laboratory and taught medical technology. From 1962 to 1972, she chaired the Saint Louis University Medical Technology Department. During her career, she published numerous articles, received many awards, and, in 1968, traveled to Finland to serve as a delegate to the International Society of Medical Technologists.

At age 68, she left teaching to pursue new ministries. Among other areas, she served as co-director of the congregation's prayer program and in the mother-house liturgy office. Over the years, Sister Gertrude explored a variety of artistic interests, including playing the accordion, painting, and crocheting. In retirement, she even learned to play the organ.

Sister Gertrude still marvels at the journey that led her to become a sister. "There is a mystery, a miracle in the way God calls each of us to the various vocations," says Sister Gertrude. After some eighty-two years of religious life, she continues to embrace the words of Isaiah 43:1, "I have called you by name. You are mine."

As we were going to press, we learned that Sister Gertrude died unexpectedly. We extend our sincerest sympathies to the Franciscan Sisters of Mary.

## Meet Our Eldest Religious - continued

*The following religious, though not the oldest in the country, were submitted by their religious institutes as the oldest members of their respective communities. We salute them all!*

Sister Mary Cecile Amore, 02-17-1905  
School Sisters of Notre Dame, Atlantic-Midwest Province  
Wilton, Connecticut

Sister Veronica Marie Brost, 03-25-1905  
Sisters of Charity, Leavenworth, Kansas

Sister Richardis Durant, 10-26-1905  
Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Sister Reinholda Eder, 10-28-1905  
Sisters of St. Francis, Savannah, Missouri

Sister Anne Mayer, 11-12-1905  
School Sisters of Notre Dame, Atlantic-Midwest Province  
Chicago, Illinois

Sister Dionys Pfefferle, 04-25-1906  
School Sisters of St. Francis U.S. Province  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Sister Janina Mangion, 08-09-1906  
Sisters of Saint Joseph, Boston, Massachusetts

Sister John Maron Abdella, 08-15-1906  
Sisters of St. Joseph, Buffalo, New York

Sister Rita Mary Neumann, 09-10-1906  
Sisters of the Presentation, New Windsor, New York

Sister DeChantal Hyland, 10-07-1906  
Benedictine Sisters, St. Scholastica Monastery  
Fort Smith, Arkansas

Sister Mary Karl, 11-05-1906  
Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters  
Huntington, Indiana

Sister Mary Louise Gagnon, 12-04-1906  
The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet  
St. Louis, Missouri

Sister Mary Laetitia Matan, 12-25-1906  
Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis  
Stevens Point, Wisconsin

Sister Margaret Kulage, 06-24-1907  
Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic  
Maryknoll, New York

Sister Annella Rhode, 08-05-1907  
Sisters of St. Francis  
Rochester, Minnesota

Sister Mary Laurentian Cerovac, 10-29-1907  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas,  
West Midwest Community, Omaha, Nebraska

Sister Daniel Downey, 06-13-1908  
Congregation of St. Joseph, Cleveland, Ohio

Sister Carmella Azzolina, 05-13-1909  
St. Walburg Monastery of Benedictine Sisters  
Covington, Kentucky

Sister Mary Hyacinthe Ruggiero, 10-25-1909  
Dominican Sisters of the Queen of the Holy Rosary  
Fremont, California

Sister Mary Theophane Sullivan, 02-02-1910  
Sisters of Notre Dame, Toledo Province, Ohio

Sister Francis Gabriel Lenihan, 03-01-1911  
Congregation of the Sisters,  
Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary  
Scranton, Pennsylvania

Sister Elizabeth Ann Bedinghaus, 01-03-1912  
Dominican Sisters of Springfield, Illinois

Brother Patrick Power, FSC, 12-22-1912  
Brothers of the Christian Schools,  
District of Eastern North America  
Beltsville, Maryland

## Message from the Executive Director

You may notice that our newsletter has had a face-lift. Among other changes, we've added the words "Sponsored by the National Religious Retirement Office" to our Retirement Fund for Religious banner. Likewise, on National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) documents, we will be adding "Sponsor of the Retirement Fund for Religious." Visually, we're striving for a more unified look across all our materials. Marketing gurus might call this "branding," but frankly our objectives are not so complex.

Our real goal is to emphasize the vital connection between the Retirement Fund for Religious (RFR) collection and the services NRRO provides to religious institutes. Nothing we do would be possible without the ongoing and overwhelming generosity of Catholics across the nation. The good we are able to do is in direct measure to the good we've been given.

I am concerned, however, that the success of the RFR may sometimes overshadow what remains a critical lack of retirement funding among religious institutes in the United States. After more than twenty years of

the collection, it would be easy to assume that the need has been met. It has not.

As I look to the years ahead, I feel a growing sense of urgency in terms of enabling religious communities to meet their ongoing retirement needs. Of particular concern is the rate at which religious are reaching retirement age and leaving compensated ministry. Today, the income of wage-earning religious underwrites a large portion of elder-care expenses, but soon this will no longer be the case. In fact, by 2019, it is projected that retired religious will outnumber working religious by nearly four to one.

Yet, the RFR makes a very real difference. While only a small percentage of religious institutes are completely funded for retirement, many have made great strides in building their retirement savings and planning for the future. Our feature story demonstrates how successful religious can be when they combine the financial and consultative assistance we offer with their own hard work and initiative. The Augustinians' project took time, effort, and sacrifice. Yet, in the end, they greatly enhanced the quality of life for their elder members while reinforcing values central to their life in community. And, they lowered their costs to boot! It was a win all the way around.



As I reflect on the good that we are able to accomplish through the RFR, I am reminded that this goodness flows from love that has come full circle: the love for God and others poured out by senior religious and the love returned through the generous donations and grateful prayers of countless Catholics. During this holy season of Easter, I pray that Jesus, the source of all love, will bless you abundantly for your generous and faithful support of our nation's elder religious.

Gratefully,  
Sister Janice Bader, CPPS

### 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@uscgb.org](mailto:retirement@uscgb.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 Jean Smith ([jsmith@uscgb.org](mailto:jsmith@uscgb.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

Sponsor of the Retirement Fund for Religious

## Calendar

### May 20, 2011

- Corrections to Retirement Needs Analysis due

### June 2011

- **Direct Care Assistance checks mailed**

### August 2011

- 3-6 CMSM Assembly, Orlando, FL
- 9-12 LCWR Assembly, Garden Grove, CA

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[www.retiredreligious.org](http://www.retiredreligious.org)

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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